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AMERICAN ESTIMATES



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# AMERICAN ESTIMATES

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*by Henry Seidel Canby*

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ESSAY AND GENERAL LITERATURE INDEX REPRINT SERIES

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## AMERICAN ESTIMATES





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## LITERATURE IN AMERICA

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### I. *On Being a Continent*

WE are made by the winds; or at least, winds make the weather, and weather controls energy which is the active principle in man. American winds are the winds of a continent and carry reminder with them. New England Aprils are swept back into the bud by glacial torrents that have roared over the snowy mountains of Gaspé and the Laurentians; the slow moving airs of August have trembled over the corn of the vast western plains; and southern gales drive through our sky the tumbled cloud masses of the Tropics and the Trades. Emerson sniffed the electric West in the winds that crossed the Berkshires and remembered that New England was only a province of a great country. The great Northwest blows through Chicago, and birds that go south by the coastline may come home by the Mississippi route. It is impossible to be an American without feeling the pull of a vast geography—except for New York that cannot see beyond its Bronx, and the Pacific Coast where east-sweeping rains and thoughts alike drop at the Sierras.

A little country, an island country, like England, is conscious of its bounds and proud of its variety. This "blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England" is all

that the nation possesses as its own; therefore, the most is to be made of its diversity: Yorkshire moors and their harsh possessiveness, the lush richness of Somerset, Sussex doggedness, Cornish peninsularity, cockney London. An island, or a land enringed like France, early learns to reckon its human assets, and preserve its idiosyncrasies. Normandy is not lost in Paris in Maupassant and Flaubert, nor the Midi in the North. England, even in industrialism, is not standardized; it is inconceivable that France will ever be reduced to level scale.

Nor is America standardized in spite of alarming tendencies. Rather, intellectually speaking, it is in the stage of centralizing which Europe passed through in the eighteenth century, when boundaries still seemed wide. We value homogeneity, we seek a common pronunciation and a like style of business letter, we wish to read the same books and magazines, because the continental winds blow over us and we realize instinctively the centrifugal forces of our home. Transportation held together the Union: journalism and education are striving to keep together the American race.

In literature this has its disadvantages. There is too much aping, too strong a desire to write from the viewpoint of New York, and—to go deeper—a lack of sturdy individualism, so that, however local may be the subject, it is impossible to say, *this* is New Englandism, *this* is Kansas, and *this* is the spirit of the South. Of course, such attributions are printed daily on the slip covers of new books, but the idiosyncrasy is not within, or it is only a mannerism of style or subject. We are determined just now to write continentally, hence the pioneer “epics” and books in which New York is rather emphatically a metropolis with a capital M.

This is a bit premature. There will be no American

epics yet.<sup>1</sup> We shall have to be a people first, and the Civil War and immigration have pushed that event into the future. We shall have to become a race before we can appreciate diversity. Just at present the current runs toward Americanism, which does not mean being like the Old Americans, who are beginning to be unpopular with our patriotic societies since they have been reminded that the ancestors believed in revolution and free speech,—but being like each other. When Cleveland grows less like Detroit, and Philadelphia stops resembling Boston, we shall be in the next stage. And that will come when the Pacific and the Atlantic press upon us as the seas upon England, when we are at home in peopled spaces, and find it a little undistinguished to be just an individual in a continent. After that perhaps epics of the new industrial America—if there are to be any epics.

But until the imagination can follow back the north wind, the east, and the south, and the west, with some certainty of knowing what thoughts and emotions belong to America, this continental mood of craving for uniformity will last.

## II. *A Hook for Leviathan*

NEVERTHELESS, the barbarian peril of our days—whether in literature, art, education, or religion—is standardization, and this is particularly true in the United States, where the interchangeable part for magazines as well as machines may be said to have been invented. But if protests against the rising tide of mediocrity are to have any weight, they must be intelligent. The European who

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Benét's "John Brown's Body" is saga rather than epic, but in any case deals with an America torn by conflicting passions and interests, yet far more truly homogeneous in culture than the post-bellum decades.

charges us with universal Babbittry and the native who gives him what few and inaccurate facts he possesses, are both sacrificing truth to rhetoric.

Standardization—whether in machinery or *mores*—is a means to an end. If the means extinguish the end, good-by to literature—and civilization. But though dangerous in a community such as America is now, and Europe soon will become, this means is indispensable; it exists; it must be handled, not denied.

No very subtle observation is required in order to note two exactly opposing currents in American life, a broad and slow, a nervous and quick; the insweep, the out-turn, if you please, of a tide. We present the interesting phenomenon (and have for two centuries) of masses of common people fumbling with keys at door after door of civilization. The civilization was once, of course, the property of a class, and that it was a finer and more precious thing than the masses will ever attain to in our times we may readily admit. Yet there they are, fumbling—rich now, ambitious now, determined to eat better, dress better, read better, live better, and even to think better. A social order that makes no provision for such upward striving is unthinkable because, under the political and economic conditions by which we live, it could not exist. And the provision is inevitably standardization. If the wife of a laborer who has become a capitalist proposes to observe the social decencies which accompany even a modest luxury she must have standards—and where there are a hundred thousand such wives standards must be standardized—in books of etiquette if you please. When some millions who have not read beyond the newspapers, if there, begin to crave fiction, essays, the magazines that supply them successfully will have to be standardized—have been,

as a matter of fact, as successfully standardized as the Ford car, with all the advantages, as well as all the disabilities, of standardization. What can go in such a magazine, and what cannot go, are both rigorously defined. It cannot be a medium for literature, though literature may slip into it; it must serve its need, and that need is real and not to be cancelled by idle criticism. The America that is learning to keep its teeth clean, read pretty good books, preserve reasonably good manners, eat properly prepared food, is the America of "The Saturday Evening Post," "The Ladies' Home Journal," the America of public schools and advertisements. Given a general condition of uplift, and such standardization is inevitable. You cannot begin to civilize all of the people all of the time except by broad methods broadly applied.

But the ignorant foreign observer and the supercilious native overlook the violent reaction which this wholesale culture, thin, weak, diffuse, naturally sets up. In every department of American life it is visible. Not merely are the already civilized protesting against a standard of standardization, but through the last of the opening doors the mob are themselves beginning to stream out into a new atmosphere where taste, individualism, self-reliance, begin to seem the highest good. Every critic knows this: in music, art, literature, conversation, living, the end-product of American civilization is far richer, more complex, more interesting than twenty years ago, than ten years ago.

Will it prevail? Alas, that is another question. It is always possible that the minority will drop into the maw of the majority and be swallowed without so much as indigestion. This mass culture, this semi-barbarism, is a beast as powerful as the German hordes that swept over the Roman empire, as deadly for civilization as the swarms of

the semi-civilized that welled up through the cracks of the classic world and drowned a society as well organized as our own.

This is the danger. This is Moloch. This is the Beast of the Apocalypse. This is Mammon. This is the Twilight of the Gods when the clumsy Giants take possession of the earth.

Why waste time and breath then in shrill and anemic complaints against a process of world education inevitable in our economy? Those who bewail the high efficiency of standardization would do better to put their energy into works of light and leading. A hundred critics shouting "Down with Babbitt" are not worth one poem, one novel, one play, which represents all that Babbitt is not, but may very possibly desire to be. A little less recrimination, please, and a little better example! With more real books, a better education, and a few great men, standardization may be trusted to take care of itself.

### III. *America*

IF ENERGY alone could make a civilization, America would lead the world in culture. Some American short stories and novels are so energetic that it wearies a tired man to read them. They are high-pressure, double-charged interest-getters, taking any hill on high gear, with interchangeable parts and a money-back guarantee attached by the publishers.

The hacks who write these stories are more energetic than French and British hacks, just as American bankers and salesmen are more energetic than their competitors abroad. The country that produces them is boiling with energy. Indeed the hack writers of a generation are a good



measure of its literary vitality; when literature is booming, they boom too; the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth let their suns go down on innumerable hacks of talent and the Augustan Age invented Grub Street. Our journalists, novelists, feature writers, short-story writers, live with a punch and write with a punch. Poets write more verse here than elsewhere, just as California trees bear more fruit. More plays are produced annually in New York than in any two cities of the Old World.

Energy is characteristic of whatever deserves the name of literature in America. Our serious fiction buds and branches like rank growth in Spring, and every kind of story is being tried, from the most archaic to the most modern. The French inventions are few in number and it is easy to see where the British are weak and where they are strong, but there is not a possibility for fiction where Americans are not failing or succeeding or both. There is no common denominator for "The Plutocrat," "Death Comes for the Archbishop," "Elmer Gantry," "Manhattan Transfer," and the stories of Ring Lardner, except energy.

We have energy to sell and need borrow none from abroad, where indeed it is notably lacking, especially among the younger writers. It is not a time for borrowing anything from Europe except those moving ideas which must always sweep backward and forward across the seas. Fastidious imitations of English urbanity or French phrase are the pallid streaks in American literature, and the only really successful imitator of the British style of social writing is Sinclair Lewis, whose adaptation of the Wellsian novel is so powerful that every one, including himself, forgets where it came from. The Gallicized intellectuals who try to play with their scene as Gide and Cocteau are playing with France, are more

fragile than their originals; and that post-war philosophy of disillusionment in which nothing has more than a relative importance and mere sensation shines with a febrile glimmer against a dark background of incoherence, simply will not export to America. Books that carry it here are, with very few exceptions, academic exercises in the expression of despair. The idea of life as an illusion of the senses with no governing principle grows feeble and literary when it encounters the rushing, roaring energy of America. It may be true, but it does not seem true, where so much is doing.

Our young writers are going to Paris and London, especially Paris, now as never before. They will find nothing being written there more vital than what we are producing here. They will find less inventiveness in technique, a narrower range of literary subjects, and in style precisely those results of a long and homogeneous culture which it is most dangerous for an outsider to imitate. The great scientific, social, and philosophic ideas of post-War Europe reach Ann Arbor or San Francisco more rapidly than to the stranger in the cafés and studios of Paris. Indeed, relativity, the cyclism of history, economic internationalism, have scarcely touched contemporary French and British literature, which is a closet affair. Einstein is likely to mean more to an American in New York than when he is in Grenoble, Chelsea, the Rive Gauche, or Oxford.

But if we cannot learn style we may learn much from abroad about the meaning of a good life and all that is implied thereby. We may adjust our sense of values which at present is knocked askew by the cost of living and the prestige of financial success. The problem is not to learn how to write like a European, but to learn how *not* to write like the stereotypes of the million-circulation Ameri-



can magazines. The young American has everything—energy, a great market rapidly extending into Europe, a new self-confidence, a vastly interesting scene, the richest, the most varied, and most mobile since the Renaissance, a country prolific in character types, a nation diverse yet so unified in custom and desire that a national literature is possible, leisure, too, if he demands it, for writing—he has everything except the wisdom to use and develop his gifts. His worst enemies are himself and the thousands of like-minded Americans who drive him toward Immediate Returns and Large-Scale Production. He cannot master the American scene because he cannot master his own energy for the slow processes necessary in literature. Find a young and successful American writer of talent and you find a dissatisfied man in conflict with himself.

The delicate-minded go off to Europe where they acquire refinement at the cost of energy. They should keep their energy and get ideals. The French and English have passed through their ages of bounding vigor and they know, as we do not, that unless the artistic conscience is satisfied the writer and his work are both unhappy. This we can learn from Europe, which, with not half of our gusto, can still get far more from living.

The current European fashions—expressionism, surrealism, Joycism, Proustism, Sitwellism, esthetic defeatism, super-intellectualism—are bad medicine for us. We must mix our own. But there are symbols in the English walled garden where leisure is protected, or the French cafés where living is a commodity to be purchased cheap, which we might ponder with profit. The young American writer needs first of all to learn how to live. His inspiration he will find at home.

IV. *To Carpers*

INSTEAD of describing America as the Land of Opportunity, it has become the fashion among these delicate-minded to call it the Land of No Opportunity—at least for art, conversation, and harmonious living. They find no graces here, and little beauty, but instead a hard conventionality of practical action, a narrow range of interest, and no manners in the sense of a nice adjustment between man and his social environment. We know how to behave, they say, but not how to make behavior agreeable. Something is wrong, they say, with the United States, or with Americans.

Perhaps too many Americans go abroad with an inferiority complex and come back with the zeal of new converts to cosmopolitan culture. It is really about time to cease complaining of the North American continent. This region of the world has passed its four centuries of test as a home for the human race. If a man cannot become serene in a New England October, or vivacious in California, or rich or cultured or both in New York, there is little hope for him anywhere. Opportunity to be all things, even an artist or a philosopher, is super-abundant. If anything is lacking it is will.

And will is no more lacking than in Europe. We have our quota of scientists, scholars, men of letters, educators, dramatists, painters, architects, our fair representation in every intellectual or esthetic activity except music. If American society still seems crude and American culture thin to the home-coming observer, it is not because cultivated minds are absent, but because it is hard to find them. They are submerged in a sea of the second rate.

What Europe and Europeanized Americans will not un-

derstand of the United States is that no one here will keep his place. We push upward like Iowa corn shoots, and the well-matured stalk is lost in the waves of new growth.

The croakers think that they are criticizing the American achievement. That is not true. It is the cultivation of the average educated American that gets on their nerves. In some countries only a few stand at the average of economic well-being and intellectual development. In the United States perhaps the majority are massed about it, a vast population that goes at least to high school, owns automobiles and radios, reads magazines and newspapers, and regards itself correctly as typically American.

If the gentry who talk so much of the intellectual poverty of the United States would stop carping at environment and belittling American achievements in the arts, they would be better able to criticize the culture of this bee swarm of the average. It *is* thin and harsh, not by comparison with a like average in Europe, where it would exceed on comparison, but in relation to the wealth, the energy, the intelligence behind it. Our swarm reads badly, talks dully when it leaves the concrete, and its experience of trading, selling, games, and gossip is monotonous and limited.

So might run a fair criticism. The music we hum at picnics and reunions stands in the same ratio to the music we pay foreigners to make for us, as the average course of American life to the experiences made possible by civilization. Yet the critic will insist upon seeing life as a *status quo* instead of a movement. What he fails to note in the United States is the constant inflow from less civilized groups that keeps down the average of culture, and the equally constant, though less obvious, stream flowing upward, away from the average into better reading, better listening, better thinking.

No one has devised a test to tell whether the line of our average is itself moving upward or downward. But it is not difficult for the individual to place himself or those around him. Are they reading better or worse—better news or cheaper, better books or weaker, better magazines or easier? This is a real criterion.

### v. *What Do You Want?*

COUNT HERMANN KEYSERLING strikes off in a paragraph one aspect of this America in evolution. There never was a country where success on a low plane of culture, but still success, was so easily gained, where so many lived fully and lived intensely in their pursuit of progress. The saint who fails of perfect saintliness, the artist who does not master his craft, the idealist who never gets his theory into practice, are not so fully alive, not so happy, as the vigorous American who sets a house, an automobile, a good business, and an education for his children as his objectives, and reaches them by middle age.

"Don't knock, boost," says the slogan, now a little dusty. It is the same idea. To turn up the intellectual nose at the rough and tumble of American life is a gesture just a little absurd in folk who can afford to be supercilious because their ancestors were willing to rough it in mixed society. The pallid individual, neurotic from too little action, emotionally starved, who looks down upon the vulgar because they live too hard, talk loud, laugh heartily, is an irritating by-product of a civilization that has to be energetic or go under. To live life fully is the first requisite for worthy living on any plane, and therefore a tipsy bootlegger shooting his car at sixty miles an hour across the border, is probably nearer heaven in the philosophic as

well as the siang sense, than a thin-blooded clerk drying in a shop corner or a critic of everything that has the demerit of still existing.

Yet a full-blooded civilization, whose richest satisfactions come from success in adventurous trading, is not far removed from barbarism, healthy perhaps, cheerful probably, but still barbarism. It is not our condition, yet, nor does Keyserling expect it, but it is one of several possible curves along which American society may travel. It is an inescapable curve for the easily successful who do not lift up their minds and hearts.

Pastors recommend religion under various labels for a state of high living on a low plane; teachers recommend education; psychologists, a better regimen for the pre-school child; statesmen, American idealism without saying just what they mean; radicals, a brand new set of institutions; physical culturists, better biceps. I, for my part, affirm that the American soul (call it spirit or consciousness of self if you please) is pitifully small by comparison with American shrewdness or American energy. Of ways of access to that soul there are many, doubtless the best being personal contact with those of greater soul than our own, example having always been more powerful than argument. When the U.S.A. in addition to supplying a post office and a federal building to every American city provides a sage, a saint, or a hero whose job is merely to live there, we shall advance faster on the road to high civilization.

Taste is not improved by command. "Read better books" makes a good slogan, but what *are* better books, and what *is* a better book for you—a true romance, a novel of the inner life, the "Travel Diary of a Philosopher" by Keyserling, a study of animal evolution, a history of the thirteenth century in France? The literary artist is not con-

cerned with taste: his job is art as the scholar's is truth, and for them to have other ends, to say, "let us rush to the aid of a crass civilization and give it what it needs," is merely to be prigs instead of artists and scholars. But the philosopher sees that literature and scholarship must and can be used to raise the spirits and enlarge the souls of his generation. And a critic of philosophic bent (and critics have to be minor philosophers) should select among books not merely what you want, but (more important) what you may want, and, with temerarious judgment, what you ought to want. He should spread, like our colonial ancestors, a table more plenteous than any single guest may need. Take what you want, and what you can. But what do you want?

Reading, no matter how solid, is never good for much unless it increases the sense of life and adds to the riches of experience. On what plane are you living; can reading raise it; if so, what reading? This is a question worth asking. In all the talk of art, reputation, success, technique, sales, popularity, one forgets that a good book is none of these things for a man reading alone, but only an experience that intensifies reality and increases its significance. Therefore the search for good books is broader than criticism, although it includes it, deeper than popularity though of popularity it must take heed; it is a search for first aids to civilization, and some of its discoveries will please the artists and some will not, and some will please the moralists, and some will not, and some will seem impossible reading to a plain American and some will warm the cockles of his heart. There is no formula for feeding the soul.



VI. *Anon Is Dead*

ONE famous author has sunk into oblivion. His name, once the best known of them all, is scarcely intelligible to our generation. Title pages of famous periodicals printed it not once but a dozen times, anthologies recorded it and readers were always asking, Who is he? The raciest writing was often over his signature, and if the great ones of the social or political world condescended to literature, he was their representative. In old newspapers and magazines his masked brilliance stirred our curiosity in childhood. Now he is unfashionable, if not altogether forgotten. Anon, alas, is dead.

The mind of a man who, like Keats, wrote burning poetry, or, like Hazlitt, pungent criticism, or, like Washington Irving, excellent stories, and printed them anonymously, is as alien to Broadway or Greenwich Village, or to Bloomsbury or Fleet Street as the character of a Quaker who went to prison rather than raise his hat. The thing is simply incredible to editors who buy names and sell names to their subscribers, or to newspapers which head every other column with a name. Even advertising in America has become personal. If there are no moral sentiments in the founder of a big business, there will be a write-up by his advertising agent in the best short-story fashion. More, the advertiser is offered a choice of names well known in literature, which, for a handsome fee, will be signed to almost any blah about himself or his goods that he specifies. A name will carry anything, and many a sweating hack makes a good living by writing articles that become important when they appear over the signature of some one great in the movies or Wall Street. Anonymity, in brief, is now an inhibition that every one tries to escape.

All this is so common, and the reasons for it seem so obvious, that we do not remember how recent the practice is, nor realize its significance. Medieval work was usually anonymous, and much of it remains anonymous in spite of laborious investigation. Who wrote "Beowulf" or the "Chanson de Roland"? Who composed "Gawayne and the Green Knight"? Anonymity was common until modern times, although a willingness to be discovered becomes more and more evident. Consider the famous pseudonyms in English literature: Gulliver, W. S., Boz, Junius, George Eliot, Geoffrey Crayon, "The Author of 'Waverley,'" Christopher North, Elia. Note that even the intensely personal R. L. S. published most of his earlier sketches as Anon and that the brilliant egoisms of Edgar Allan Poe appear among the critiques of "Graham's Magazine" with no name attached. As many important books, essays, and poems before 1850 were first published anonymously or over a pseudonym as with the name of the author attached. We have come in a few generations from

The Pickwick Papers  
By Boz

to what would be nationally advertised as

Charles Dickens  
writes in the current  
*Green Book*

This increase in egomania must have impressed the least observant, for it is by no means confined to journalism and the arts. Signboards now display individuals who gesture urgently to the passerby and speak by exclamatory caption. Most of these are already familiar types—the banker, the lumberman, the druggist. Soon they will be pictures of well-known persons, who will gladly consent to lend their



faces for the publicity value:<sup>1</sup> Harold Bell Wright with lifted finger will warn us, from the roadside, to read only moral fiction, and John Barrymore, in the blaze of an electric sign, will be pointing at the springs of an automobile that solves the traffic problem.

And yet it cannot be proved that the columnists, the dramatic critics, the feature and sports writers, who are leaders of this modern exhibitionism, are vainer or more egotistical than their predecessors, when they had predecessors. Read the "Noctes Ambrosianae" of Christopher North for such a display of personal whim and effrontery in criticism as would be hard to find today. Nor are short-story writers and novelists and playwrights more willing to be self-assertive than when Anon was in power. Such instances of colossal egoism as may be collected from Pope and his age or Dr. Johnson and his circle cannot be exceeded even in New York. Pope was incredibly vain, Southey clamored for publicity, the young men of the "Edinburgh Review" were possessed by a kind of sadism and they fed their egos with cruelty. Sterne pulled wires for a reputation with a shameless assiduity that a modern publicity agent may well envy, and through the aristocratic ages, from Chaucer down to Tom Moore, writers bootlicked their patrons with an unblushing vulgarity that is more offensive than the noisy appeals of moderns to their new master, the crowd. There has been no general decline in virtue, and a shrinking rather than expansion of the ego. But now "everybody is doing it." When Pope exploited his malicious personality one got something worth the pains; but when everyone flings not only his opinions but also his name and idiosyncrasies in your face there is a phenomenon worth discussing. If this be vulgarity, then vulgarity has become fashionable.

<sup>1</sup> It has happened. This sentence was written in 1926.

It may often be vulgar, but this glorification of the capital *I* is not explained by calling it vulgarity. What we are encountering is a panicky, an almost hysterical, attempt to escape from the deadly anonymity of modern life, and the prime cause is not the vanity of our writers but the craving—I had almost said the terror—of the general man who feels his personality sinking lower and lower into a whirl of indistinguishable atoms to be lost in a mass civilization.

In village life, everyone knows everyone else, and knows about them, which, for the ever-sensitive ego of man, is even more important. The villager moves and has his being in the consciousness of others. They realize him or her, not as a clerk, stenographer, or salesman, but as George, Mary, or Jim, with such a background of manner, experience, and temperament as one gets in a novel. That this consciousness is often unfavorable does not change the argument. Dislike is better than disregard, and unpopularity preferable to loneliness. Only matured and self-sufficient personalities or those beaten and crushed by life prefer the anonymity of an impersonal, unfriendly environment. A familiar word in passing, a gibe, a recognition of that ego which we are always cherishing is the stimulant that humanity craves.

City living, however, as we Americans know it, is impersonal. The *I-that-am-I* lives for most of its day among strangers, and comes home at night to the unhomely environment of an apartment in a beehive—and the personality of a newspaper. In the modern university, instead of a family of like-minded students all nicknaming each other, there are two thousand strangers in a class; instead of a dozen professors in familiar rivalry there is a great teaching machine, in which the units are solitaires, drifting in and out, as impersonal in their relationship as the

employees of a steel mill. Clubs, since Prohibition, have lost their social values and become places to eat and run. For writers there is now no Grub Street even. A few of the lonely youngsters take refuge in Greenwich Village, where tradition says they will meet their kind, but most of them are scattered in lodging-houses, small jobs, farms, newspapers—anywhere, everywhere.

Once out of the family, if there is a real family, or that enlargement of the family which only the fortunate get in school or college, the struggle against anonymity begins in earnest. The crowd draws us under and we become mere units: a job with a name that is no more than a number, a wife indistinguishable from ten thousand others waiting in line in the delicatessen stores. We struggle against the tug of the current in ways that are pathetic in their triviality. We put the name of our town on the cross-bar of the automobile—"Grant-on—the Athens of Florida"—as if to say, "at least you can tell where I come from." We thrill at the sight of our names in print, until a front-page reference has become a synonym for success. We join associations where "brother," "comrade," or "good fellow" is the label and chief excuse for being. We are like those pathetic survivals from the great anonymous civilization of the later Roman Empire, whose names are found upon scrolls and monuments with the additions of a race or a country, as if that might serve to give them passing identity—Heliodorus the Phenician, Polycrates of Attica.

The city dominates our way of living whether we are in town or country, and the modern city is inevitably standardized and anonymous. The individual is sinking day by day nearer to the conditions of nobody. This fact, incapable for the vast majority, has its influence even upon dress. Never was there such a widespread striving by both male and female to be correct in hat, coat, rouge,

earrings, cigarettes, shirt, cuff buttons, width of trousers, color of shoes. The noon hour in New York is a dress inspection, in which the stenographers and clerks are so busy with discoveries and comparisons that some of them forget to eat. Every office boy, secretary, and minor executive is busy testing how well he measures up to the fashion, which means that he is trying to feel himself a visible part of the one great personality he knows—the city's—New York's.

More and more society comes to resemble a school of fish, marked alike, moving alike in drifts and dartings, so spontaneous in the mass that one would say there was a group soul. Songs, jokes, slang, dances, opinions appear and spread and disappear with the rhythm of an epidemic or a cyclone. Thanks to the radio the mass thought and mass emotion are instantaneously communicable everywhere. There is a difference in tempo but not in kind between the effect upon individuality at the Podunk corner store and its cracker box, and New York.

And yet man himself is just as he always was: a self-sympathetic person craving authority, expression, recognition, and a sense of being somebody. In all probability he is much more personal in his desires, because they are now more complex, than the epic heroes whose names served for nations and whose actions were history. Because I am insignificant among a hundred millions of people, because what I say never gets beyond my family or my office, because no one has need or opportunity to discover what I think, because I am not Roland, or Francis I, or Dr. Johnson, or Herbert Hoover—all this does not mean that I crave any the less the position of the "old man" of the savage tribe, whose words established custom, or the intense personal expression of Mary Queen of Scots. It is impossible that my ego should impress a nation, it is

difficult to make a hundred people aware of my existence as differentiated from the society in which I live, yet while my rational self accepts this conclusion, my emotions balk at it. I must at all costs feel myself to be intensely personal, and if not myself, then my little world in which I move.

The answer, of course, is vicarious experience, and this intense desire is responsible for most of the caperings, the name callings, the exhibitionism described above. In literature we always give our masters what they want; and since the crowd, not the patrons, is now master, we give them personal journalism. Watch the girl swaying at the strap in the subway crowd, a mere fiber of the impersonal mass, and see how eagerly she sinks herself in the blazing personalities of the paper she holds, in which everything from the fashions in stockings to international news is told by a Tom, Dick, Harry, or Ann speaking intimately, familiarly to her. Or note in an apartment home, as like to ten thousand other apartment homes as one cell is to another, how the magazine on the table with its intensely personal style seems to radiate the familiar and the individual like a new kind of electrical toy.

This craving for the friendly, familiar voice is responsible for the success of the column; for the impressionistic personal criticism, where "I like" and "I hate" are the dominants; for photographic illustrations of short stories that are themselves romantic; for the astonishing success of the popular lecture in America; and, finally, for the blazoning of names, as if to say, it is Frank, Don, Mary, Kathleen, not a great remote Author, above all not Anon, that is writing for you. It also lies behind the vogue of the popular magazines' "true stories" and "confessions," which are actually fiction made so personal as to satisfy the craving for individual experience. Furthermore, this rush



of the anonymous ego to take refuge in rich, glaring personalities that write of the world as if it were still intimate, is an escape from science which has pervaded education with a consciousness of abstract, immutable physical laws that take no account whatever of wish and ignore individuality completely. How lonely is the very sound of words like force, atom, ion, degeneration, sub-consciousness, behaviorism! No wonder that we who live in a civilization made by science should desire its opposite.

And hence, what I have called the universal exhibitionism of modern journalism is undoubtedly good for the crowd. It heartens them. It searches out the individual and speaks to him. The columnist is an agent of humanism as much as the dramatist of the Renaissance was, and the novelist who writes his autobiography for a novel is medicining the need of personal experience in the reader. Fiction and, especially, criticism often suffer from the vulgarity of too much egoism, but more often they suffer because one feels a dramatic temperament standing between the reader and the truth and is annoyed precisely as the early Protestant was annoyed by the priest who stood between himself and God. But let the fastidious hesitate before they condemn the capers of the public's favorites. The publicists of today are simply Shakespeare's clowns come to outnumber all the rest of the cast. Their display of personality is often a mask like the clown's cap and bells. When they assume their copyrighted ego, which is advertised by night on the electric signs, they are free to be shrewd, critical, and expressive because they know that their audience craves the human name, the human intonation, the human idiosyncrasies and prejudices that are rapidly becoming mere words. Bernard Shaw has not hesitated to expose his similar methods, and there is no shame in them. Who that is hopelessly anonymous him-

self—and that is the permanent condition of most of us—will regard Anon if he can hear an authentic personal voice? Even savages give names to the natural forces they worship.

So much for an honorable and deserved defence of the egomania of our times. But what of the intellectually fortunate, that remnant in whose hands culture must persist, the cultivated minority? Are they yielding to exhibitionism? Is it not true that they seek the same stimulation of the ego that the masses more justifiably ask for, and that when they write they throw reticence to the winds?

Criticism, which is always written for the cultivated, is shot through today with capital *I*'s. The delicate art of a Walter Pater, that suffuses its subject with a glow from the writer's personality and yet establishes general principles and makes subtle interpretations, is almost impossible of general influence in our times. There are men and women capable of it, but they do not practice it, except in holes and corners. The audience for it is very limited. The tiny minority that can digest thorough-going criticism is interested chiefly in its own quarrels over recondite or esoteric literature, and the generally cultivated are impatient of so unsuited a dish. They wish to know what Walter Pater did on the bright afternoon when he discovered the Renaissance, and how he lit his gem-like flame. Even university pundits with a record of sober expositions of Arnold-like dignity loosen up when they come to town and begin to pat young authors on the head and tell what happened to their complexes when they first read James Joyce. It is a sociable, merry, vivacious society, this community of the modern literati, and preferable to the solemnities of research in the sources of Chaucer and the language of the "Ancren Riwe," but one begins to wonder what will become of criticism that is *not* autobiography,

and to wonder if the end will not be some painless process by which culture comes from inoculation. "Know me," says the critic, "hear what I think, see how I am moved, and you will become inevitably a person of taste."

Anon had to give his reasons, for otherwise no one would believe him. His opinions were no good unless he could back them up. Now that he is dead, emotion does seem to be taking the place of reason, opinion is driving out principle, and impressionism has made off with the art and science of criticism, taking the garage with the car. It is all very jolly and very good for the lonely atoms that were beginning to believe that there was nothing intimate left for them outside their own ego, but must we all be given a celebrity's private emotions every time we ask for critical nourishment?

The passion for nonanonymity is not likely to decrease. As clothes, food, transportation, language, and emotion become increasingly standardized, inhibitions begin to enfeeble the ego. It becomes actually more difficult to think and feel personally, to be a husband, a citizen, a servant, a soul in an individual sense. Formulas exist for everything, even for an expression of gratitude, a laugh, a scream, a faint. We live in such formulas. Eccentricity is notably declining, especially in America, and eccentricity is one of the indices of personality. All the more will the colorless seek color, the conventionalized mind crave spontaneity, the anonymous and impersonal desire a vicarious indulgence in egoism. Novels are already biography to an extent never reached before. Novels have always been made up very largely from the personal experience of the writer transmuted into typical adventure, but the modern novel of the familiar kind depends to a dangerous extent upon trivial happenings which gain their only significance from



the ordinary but very personal individual who experiences them. Taking a bath, hugging a sweetheart, dictating to a stenographer, getting drunk—all these things are described with what the author thinks is realism, but which actually provides only the same satisfaction of egoism as may be had from looking at the pictures of familiar individuals in the rotogravure sections of the Sunday supplements.

The art of fiction may have gained access to inner recesses of the personality hitherto kept private, but it has lost its detachment and its sense of the really significant. As Henry James said of the disease in the mild form which he studied, in his notes on the modern novel, what we have in many new novelists is more often material for fiction than fiction itself.

I repeat that all this trotting up and down of the ego is as inevitable as transportation and lighting, and if the popular emotions are exploited by the vulgar and the cynical, nevertheless the jolly fellows who scatter vitamins where they go and put rouge on the pallid cheeks of routine existence are blessing their generation. Yet too much genius has gone into clowning. We are not all of us Buddhists to make the Name a sacred formula which repeated often enough will satisfy every want. There should be some precincts of the temple of literature where critics especially will leave their ego in the subconsciousness where it belongs and look at the object rather than their own reactions.

It is not necessary and it is not advisable to relapse into the impersonality of Anon. The stiff formalities of the old form of address were largely due to the dignity of the caste system. The remote third person has no value in a democracy, but it is surely possible to say "I" and "me" without transforming a critique into an autobiography. And pre-

cisely because we are democratic in our casual relations and because, like the Missouri frontiersman in Parkman's narrative, we say, "Howdy, stranger. What's your name? Where do you come from? What's your business?" to every writer we meet, the rich personality in literature has an opportunity never equalled before. Let a man make a name for himself and by print and by lecture, as well as by radio, he can broadcast everywhere. What advertisers call buyer resistance and publishers are beginning to name reader resistance does not exist for him. His audience, knowing him by name, are ready to listen. It is a crime against opportunity, then, if he always talks of himself.

Not less of the personal, but more responsibility in the personal, is what we need. Those who break through this shell of anonymity that so oppresses us should do more than shout "I am I" from the apartment windows. Subtle things wait to be accomplished in criticism; a finer touch is needed there. Beauty has been almost lost from poetry. Humor is broader than it is long. The American, even more than other moderns, lives without principles and without plan. It is only the rare person who can do the rare thing needed, but what a chance today if he has a name and can keep his head! He is known among the anonymous, and whether he talks sense or nonsense he will be heard. The London passion for the theater gave Shakespeare a like opportunity. He could write gorgeous and none too intelligible poetry and wise and subtle philosophy in prose so long as his drama held. The analogy with our day is close. Personality is now at a premium and the personal touch is a necessity for crowd-weary men. There is no need to resurrect Anon, but Ego should take some reducing exercises before we weary of his grossness.

VII. *Deepness of Earth*

THE foreign lecturer (certainly not anonymous) with a "message" has become a nuisance, but when the lecturer is himself a message, complaint is voided. Matthew Arnold, so it is said, was seldom heard beyond the first three rows of his audience, and yet the man stood for so much in himself that he seems to have left a deep impression behind him. Those who could not hear, apparently felt.

Æ, when he visited America, made more than a usual impression upon American audiences. He could be heard, and the soft Irish-English that came through his great beard was readily comprehensible, but it was what the man palpably was that counted. For here was a hearty, humorous mystic who had lived in the depths of a nation, and radiated energy, ideas, inspiration for a third of a century, a man tolerant in a time of hate and bitterness, constructive when destruction was the only fashion, confident of the spiritual power of devotion to an ideal, while self-seekers, fanatics, and the predatory raged at each other and tore Ireland to pieces. It is not hard to be a dreamer, it is not hard to be a "booster," it is not hard to be a martyr, devoted leadership is not rare, but to keep a sense of human values in times of great disorder or great success is given to few men large enough of mind and soul to count in history.

We do not envy Ireland its distractions, but we do covet its George Russells. No one seems to be thinking as he is thinking, on this side of the Atlantic. Americans do not even quarrel over values. We have committed ourselves so completely to a state where every individual has his

share of comfort, his right to noise, his opportunity for a formal education, his means of cheap transportation, his privilege of reading two newspapers a day, that questions as to the quality of our living seem impertinent. There are scolders and deriders of course, but they are noisier than their audiences, and have no plan of salvation except a "don't" or a "stop." Thoreau, who was regarded as a harmless fool by his Concord neighbors, would be certified a lunatic in any suburb today. And yet, like the makers of the Irish renaissance, all he wanted was to make the world without correspond to the mind within, so that an American could keep his soul his own in a not too hostile New England. Thoreau *really* believed that without vision a nation perishes. So does George Russell, and by vision both mean not emotional rhetoric or moral diatribes, or tiresome conformity, but the perception of values which belong to a rounded life where the spirit is as comfortable as the body. Russell has made coöperative farming successful in Ireland. He is an economist as well as a poet. But where is the American dirt farmer who stands upon a platform of better ideas, more spiritual happiness, more depth of living, for the agriculturist? Give us higher wages, the unions say, and we will take care of the spiritual values. Keep the country prosperous and we will guarantee its civilization, say the capitalists. It was not thus that Emerson reasoned.

Indeed, the draining of idealism from American literature is made painfully evident by the mere presence of such powerful idealism as George Russell's. Our skillful journalism, our highly competent realism, our sudden grip upon the weapons of satire and irony, are well enough, but there is a kind of spiritual provincialism in a widespread literature that assumes an exclusive interest in complexes, abnormalities, material success and failure,

neurotic relationships, the form, the noise, the by-products of life in the busy streets. And if, to modern Americans, there is something naïve in an Emerson who insists on believing that every New Englander has the soul of an incipient genius, or in a George Russell who expects his poets to create revolution and his mystics to be the men chosen to direct practical affairs, is it not we perhaps who are the naïve ones, when we assume that prosperity will take care of the prosperous, and believe that a nation can be successfully bred on tabloids and educated by merely getting on, that we can find happiness where the advertisements tell us to buy it, and satisfaction in the life depicted for us in our books.

We are spread very thin over this continent, and even in New York we go upward (toward, not into, the skies) far easier than downward. Sometimes as one reads the thin competent poetry of our city dwellers and the strident realism of our novelists, or notes the rarity of the contented man in America, the nervous inability to sit and meditate, the good-humored fear of emotion, the failure to take pleasure easily, the utter divorce between women particularly and such permanent qualities of their environment as sky, soil, and sun, it does not seem to be spirituality we lack as yet, for we have scarcely reached its possibilities, but just common sense.

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## MEDITATIONS IN THE WOODS

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### I. *Skunk Cabbage*

THE first white Americans had the greatest opportunity since Adam's for the naming of new and beautiful creations of evolutionary nature, but fancy did not follow them across the water. They were as heavy tongued as they were heavy handed.

In the marshes by their huts, before the first peepers piped, bold emerald spearheads in companies thrust through the mold, pointing at the April sun. The quick fertility of the New England Spring was in these robust barbarians that tore upward through the forest carpet, and when the scarlet buds on the swamp maples flecked the black pools with crimson, they had become trumpets shouting green strident laughter at the pale skies. They called them skunk cabbages! As a royal palm looks like a feather duster so these lush scrolls may have looked like cabbages, and their crushed leaves had the raucous smell of musk; yet a thousand sonnets died in that misnomer.

A bare knoll in April sun, decked with rose-white little lilies afloat on bending stems, so delicate that at a touch they bleed and wilt, so ephemeral that they live only between last cold and early warmth. There is no such flower



for moralizing, no better epitome of northern Spring. They named it blood root!

On the moist wood slopes where shrubby blossoms are out but the trees are still severe, ten thousand tongues like pointed heads of spotted snakes make a soft footway where the April wanderer can step without frightening the shy arriving birds. Tiny rockets bursting into gold on the downward curve hang in hundreds above the leaves. When the wind blows the bed flares into brilliance, but on the lull each pointed bell droops on its stem. To this delicate blend of strangeness and beauty they gave a name—dog-tooth violet!

Dogs, indeed, were more favored than men or gods. The vagrant wild apples that fill our country Mays with bloom are English born and came before the quota laws with the daisy, the buttercup, the dandelion, and the lilac of which two famous American poems have been made. But the best of May is native, a shrub that knows the unities, a modest tree that seeks the light and screens the inner woodlands with ordered clusters of leafy candelabra from the oak branch to the meadow turf. In May in four pointed flame from green to white to tip of rose, its flowery candles are lit, and not even the rhododendron clusters hung over Allegheny torrents excel the lucid blossoms of the dogwood. If they had named this flower from the white-tailed deer the poets might have forgiven them.

This is only the beginning of the indictment. When flowery wisps began to spray upward in the wilderness they noticed that the fish were running up the rivers and named the fringed exquisite, shad bush. The finest of our native hardwoods, that rises like a sequoia with wide-spread arms upholding in Spring a multitude of tulip blossoms (see Poe's too little known description in "The Domain of Arnheim"), they called a poplar—least inter-

esting of European trees. Our cheery morning thrush, because his breast was red, must be a robin, a not unhappy choice, but evidence of how carelessly they looked at nature. The catbird we forgive them; that was inevitable; but with the name of milkweed they banned from poetry a lovely plant, and a brave flower in August was killed for literature when Joe-Pye gave it a name. June in all the Appalachian country from the foothills to the west slopes is laurel month, but laurel is our later addition, the settlers called it ivy, for apparently a vine and a shrub were all one to them. To be sure it is not laurel either, but Greece is far away. Last ignominy, that powerful bird who swings in flight above the hawks and soars with rigid wings over counties; he who for some reason hidden in time will not cross the Hudson, even when below him it is only a silver thread, but, south and west, belongs in our high sky, so much more roomy than the English heaven, and so much bluer when he and his mates soar out their summer's day; when our ancestors found him gorged, somnolent by the carcass of a wolf-torn deer, and saw that he was vulture by vocation, they named him not from his majestic wings or telescopic eyes, but by the foul red wattles, a naked shame that the heavens had hid. Good-by to poetry when he who outflies the airplane became a turkey buzzard.

## II. *October Phantasy*

ON OCTOBER 14, 1777, General John Burgoyne, being hard pressed in the neighborhood of Saratoga, sent a message of virtual surrender wrapped in rhetoric to his opponent General Gates, by the hand of Major Kingston, "a well-formed, ruddy, handsome man who expatiated



with taste and eloquence on the beautiful scenery of the Hudson River and the charms of the season."

Mr. F. J. Hudleston, in his sprightly memoir of "Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne," thinks that this is an excellent example of good old Anglo-Saxon poker-face phlegm. Transparent bluffing, we should call it, and yet if Major Kingston did not speak his whole mind, it was not just weather that served his turn. October on the Hudson and those lovely marches of New England through which Burgoyne had been pushing southward in the Autumn sunlight was a novelty to which an English gentleman even when harassed by skirmishes and forest hardships could not be oblivious. For October in England is proverbially brown as ale, a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. And the October Major Kingston saw as he dodged an occasional bullet or rode into the brush to bring back a homesick Indian, was an exuberant month whose soft blue haze floated like veils about a brilliant beauty. Major Kingston had read, like every one else, Mr. Pope's pastorals, and it is not improbable that from his father's library table in Kent or Sussex he had picked up Mr. Thomson's "Seasons," so that, the beauties of the Hudson having smitten his susceptible fancy, he would have been ready with goddesses, shepherdesses, or abstractions, in case his proffered armistice was not well received, and it became necessary to discuss the Autumn weather in some detail. Yet certainly there had been nothing in his European experience to prepare him for such a carouse of nature, such an upsetting of the paint pots of the world, such a harmony of air, earth, and sky in a composition so sense-provoking that it is questionable whether any art since the sculpture of the Greeks has so perfectly expressed life force in tranquillity as our American Fall.

There were canoe birches among the pines as Major

Kingston led his horse over the new cut corduroy that smelt of fresh bark and brown swamp water, and the birches were blanched ivory in a mist of gold, and the pines of a green drenched in azure. In the lowlands by the road a perpetual fire of scarlet and crimson raced through the maples. When the partridges roared upward through the hawthorns and sumach, broken leaves of garnet and gold floated down like blood etherealized. The Major might have hit those brown birds on the wing as they curved sharply through the purple ashes and plumped into thickets of rosy dogwood, but for a novice it would have been hard shooting. The crude American loyalists popped off their heads with rifle bullets, but that was not sporting. The bright blood was no brighter than the leafy floor on which it fell.

Better to save a shot for the deer, that flung up white banners which many a greenhorn in the front rank had mistaken for a flag of truce, and bounded on winged ankles between the vast forest columns that arched on and on until the eye oppressed by gloom sought some terminal of light and did not find it but could see only hour after hour the white deer scuts flashing or a shambling bear, or, skulking from tree to tree, the painted Indians of the advance. It was a relief when the Hudson valley opened pleasantly in brown hay fields around General Schuyler's barns, and elms rusty yellow, and rural sights familiar to English eyes. Yet even here pagan October camped upon their heels, pines and birches vivid with flickering streamers of scarlet Virginia creeper peered over their stockades, while crooked lanes of goldenrod fringed with asters, lavender, purple, and blue, led toward the enemy.

The ruddy Major Kingston may well have been puzzled by the contrast between the land and its people. The In-

dians were right enough. They whisked from dirty skins into a bravery of paint and correspondent yelling, like the sassafras which one frost turned into a coat of many colors, or the scarlet-flaming oaks, so furtive and wild by comparison with their meadowed English cousins, yet so blatant in October.

As for the natives—that was a queer relationship. The loyalists were so anxious to be reckoned good Englishmen that what they knew of America they were ashamed to admit. But the rebel Yankees must have puzzled him. He had seen them on scouts, as prisoners, and on his embassies to frontier posts. He was to see more of them on the march back to Boston of the beaten army. They were at home in this gaudy wilderness, could glide noiselessly over the leaf carpet, shoot the scuttled deer on the bound, trot on a path that wound through the Autumn glories on what seemed an air route so little was the soil disturbed. As much as the Indian they were at home in their America. And yet he observed, and his Hessian colleagues in imprisonment were to comment upon it also in the books they wrote upon the Americans, that a sober simplicity was the characteristic of these frontier men. Officers and troops seemed all to have come from some common environment in which a reliable completion of the day's job was the realized ideal. When General Stark beat the Germans at Bennington, Congress voted him a complete suit of clothes and a piece of linen. Admirable common sense in a gift to a man who had fought all day in warm October! These fellows seemed all to be farmers, and their officers lawyers, or (like Arnold) shopkeepers. They drank to be sure, but sang chiefly psalms, knew not the meaning of the word elegance, made fun of Gentleman Johnny's ornate style as containing more words than sense; indeed were the simplest, drabbest set

of commonsense folk imaginable. They were practical, thrifty, indifferent to beauty (judging from their clothes and their gardens), a cold, calculating, no-chance-taking lot.

How, Major Kingston may have reflected, can the extreme prosaicness of this people be reconciled with the savage beauties of their environment (if it had been the War of 1812, he would have said "with the romance of their environment")? How can a pedestrian race live in the midst of such an October? What will they be like when a hundred and fifty years of this potent nature has warmed their fancies as the blue Mediterranean warmed Italy and Greece? Either, said he, exercising that gift for anachronism which all heroes possess at moments of crisis—either they will reduce nature to their own drabness, or the American Autumn, which they name Fall, strangely, since in it a superabundance of ungarnered vitality wastes away in splendor, this American October will fertilize their spirit with something which only some civilized equivalent of the Indian's war paint will express.

After a century and a half the philosophical are still wondering which.

### III. *While Brown Brooks Run*

THE actual man of industrialism has a name waiting for him. He will be a cockney. Cities will be his environment, and when he leaves them he will drag a tawdry line of communication after him. He will never be far from a picture palace, a drug store, and an office building. Even out of town he will keep his mind urban. For him there will be only two kinds of country: lots and fields; two kinds of trees: evergreen and not evergreen;

two kinds of flowers: garden and wild; two kinds of birds: big and little; two kinds of weather: good and bad. The infinite changes of the wind will mean nothing to him and the rain only wet. He will not look at the sky or consider the stars. Nature will be a word used of scenery in the movies.

Instead of deep influences of natural environment which have shaped men from the beginning of time, he will have a manufactured background, artificial but as potent as the old. His life will move to a rhythm of quick sounds and broken noises, his eye will be accustomed to the rectangles and straight lines of man's fabrication, his intelligence will be constantly polishing its angles against the facets of other men. The motives of earlier civilizations: food and its making, shelter and its making, safety from hardship and violence, will be at one or two removes from his own experience and hence his mind will be free to sophisticate upon profit. This will be his obsession, for in a cockney world profit can be immediately spent in comfort or pleasure not otherwise to be secured, and not even cockneys can live happily in cities without constant excitement and the means to purchase it. There is neither pride nor beauty in a tenement, even if it is called an apartment house.

Literature of the older kind will be impossible to the cockney. He cannot make it, and will not understand it. The rich beauty of Warwickshire which suffuses the poetry of Shakespeare comes from a world lost to him. He cannot imagine Milton's Eden, and he is empty of those memories of rural beauty without which Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats (absurdly called cockney), Browning, Tennyson, are inconceivable. The unbroken impulse from the first atomic stir through crescent nature to the poet's mind stops short of him. He can communicate with nature only



through a machine. Hence, being man and having carried his creative mind and need for beauty into the streets, he will make a new literature for himself, of which fragments are already appearing, nervous, intelligent, dynamic, racked often by feverish rhythms, shaken into rapid scenes, sharp paragraphs, quick impressions, always a moving picture even when most philosophical. His cockney ideas will be standardized and broadcast as quick as conceived. Every year will see its new style because there will be infinite stimulus and little time for reflection in the cockney environment. Art, religion, literature, will be quickly assembled, often tinkered with, quickly scrapped, not like the peach, the turf plot, or the pine tree, slowly developed, slowly and fully matured. It will be a civilization capable of everything but peace. Wisdom it may get, but rest and contentment it will never know.

Are we all to be cockneys then?—in America especially, which leads the way towards cockneydom as she leads in all the processes of the industrial revolution—leads, indeed, through such rapid changes that the airplanizing of the country in the next decade may complete what motorizing has so clearly begun?

Impossible! Some of us will never be cockneyed. It is harder to domesticate a wild animal or change a species than to industrialize some kinds of men and women. Even the most artificial of modern races—the American—takes to the woods, mountains, or shore in increasing numbers, for increasing periods of time, every year. The aristocratic habit of travel or *villegiatura* has been adopted by a vast bourgeoisie who otherwise might be forced wholesale into cockneydom.

There is no real danger, therefore, that the vital contact of men with the soil will go unrepresented in literature, although it may degenerate into a babble o' green fields.

Modern cities may not produce Hardys and Wordsworths. How can they, and why should they? But the country will and must; our own country when it is known and felt as Thoreau perceived New England, or Lady Sackville-West the English land.

Nevertheless, we Americans sit on the fence. We are pulled toward cockneydom and dragged back to nature. With our national tendency to standardize we have felt that American literature should go one way or another, and indecision has held us back from both. Read the critics, and see how they are all for or against cockneydom, never realizing that we must go both ways with all our energy—cockneys to the right, nature men to the left.

The cockneys are ahead in this generation. Their books are more interesting and more novel. Only a woman now and then, like Willa Cather, or a symbolist like Eugene O'Neill, springs in advance on the other side. But others must awake into vigor as a Connecticut hillside wakes in the first cool nights of September and at sunrise flames into goldenrod, aster, and gentian. While brown brooks run and sumach lights in fall, while pastures glimmer on mountain slopes, while thrushes sing and balsam scents, and meadows sparkle in May, there will be some who will never yield to rattle and roar and bang, smoke and grease and asphalt, taut nerves and racing brains. Every street must have two ends, and one in the country.

#### IV. *Snuggedy Swamp*

“THE trouble with New York,” a wise statesman remarked some time ago, “is that it is so full of unnecessary and superfluous people.” He might have said “the trouble with America.” But they do not move us,

these needless people who neither feel keenly nor think with excitement, who neither create, administer, enjoy, nor sympathize. They are the real slaves of the modern industrial order who carry on the economic routine, snuffing with predatory noses or gobbling their limited diet of income, exercise, and lust. If their masters live less happily than Greeks upon the proceeds of their toil, it is because they do not know they are masters.

Nothing counts but energy latent or displayed, or its reflection in such symbols as the tubular masses of the mother factory of the flivver brood in Detroit, the white shaft of the insurance building rising over Columbus, or Snuggedy Swamp. The thousands of dull men and women whose minds are below the life line, the tawdry White Ways of a hundred cities, the endless succession of undistinguished fields streaming by the railroad window, the barren but not beautiful, the jumbled suburb, the strewn boxes of a bungalow settlement, the burnt clearing, the time-clock brain—exist only in the illusion of an indivisible Present and the delusion of a Progress which arrives by mere breeding. The churl had no history and neither have these. They live only in geography or statistics, and an exclusiveness that forgets them when possible is not snobbery but self-defense. It is the arbutus and hepatica in protest against the luncheon box and empty soft-drink bottle, the scarce-won liberty of the intellectual mind denying the weight of the average and the tyranny of mass. It took some billions of years for this slimy planet to be capable of a garden, and some millions before man had both time and inclination to observe the beauty of a breast, the curve of a marsh, the value of a thought not tied to fear or hunger. Shall we lose our gift of humor and pure cerebration on the concrete highway between signboard and gas station, or in the milling subway



crowd? Not and never while sensibilities are still inherited from good germ plasm. Better a negro cowering from "Plat Eye" in the moss-draped night than that smug person with manicured brain and a face that Renaissance painters gave to those who cast lots for the garments of Christ, who is the advance agent for what some call Civilization. But why be either?

All this is a high philosophical Preface to Snuggedy Swamp, yet with so many empty words (as the Chinese say) flying about, such as "Civilization," "Culture," "Beauty," which friends and enemies hurl at each other meaning everything or nothing, a Preface is indispensable. How otherwise indicate that a cypress, a redbird, or a negro child may have more than an atomic significance?

The road to Snuggedy Swamp leads through the pine barrens, it is the road down which Washington made his majestic progress to see and be seen of the new States. He commented on the poverty of the soil, being a good business executive not inspired by unproductive beauty. Barrens is a harsh name for these stretches of sand-set columns, trailed over with amber jessamine and drifted through with green clouds of red-berried cassio, out of which cardinals drop like sparks and mocking birds sing: "Here, here, here, no, no, no, there, there, there, yes, yes, cheerio, cheerio." The road is cinnamon, the darkey houses are set with turquoise shutters under green magnolias, the little "nigs" dance in the sun, the old "dahs" balance baskets of rice lilies on their turbans, whiff smoke from their pipes, and glance out of furtive bird eyes. The men have plug hats over blue jeans. They are not of our world, or of any world but this sunlight on the edge of spectral forests.

Tennyson from his cloud leans his curled beard over this happy animal world and quotes from himself, "I, to

herd with narrow foreheads, vacant of our glorious gains." "Which gains?" one murmurs, and moves on down a plantation byway where strings of black children in pinks and blues flash white teeth as our shadow leaves them, down piney aisles by the great ditch dug once in sweat and pain and laughter that the water might flood the rice fields at the appointed time, and the rice go to the mill, and the money come home to Fair Lawn or Hampton, Harrietta or El Dorado, to build the great house which now is fading behind the Corinthian portico into the jungle that comes to meet it across the ruined quarters from the forest, and plant the slumbrous avenue of live oaks that drape their splendid melancholy in torn festoons of moss, a camouflage of spacious life withdrawn.

On by the broken flood gates until the forest lifts its knees above black water, and foot goes no further.

Gently the boat moves over water carpets of emerald weed and golden cups of bladderwort, pushing between tapered columns of cypress in a gray dusk, green glowing at the roof. Turtles plop, bright alligators slide over black logs; a tree, set with white birds as with candles, is suddenly awave with flashing wings as the ibis flock circles through the gloom to light. With slow beat the great white egrets fly over the bursting tree tops, each silent bank and dip and pulse an accent upon solitude.

Then the bayou of Snuggedy Swamp, a landscape from the moon, where spectral cypresses bow mossy beards, gray old men forgotten in a wilderness of black water; the quiet of Africa over still flowing water, still flowing moss in rhythm without motion, beautiful stagnation, the gray heart of the lowlands into which has drained all the slow melancholy of this deserted earth, and lies content there—a warbler singing like a tinkling bell in the dusk, —an egret in the sky. . . .

"What of it, poet?" It is impossible to answer with the assured obscurity of Browning. In the large it means too much, in the little only Snuggedy Swamp, and the herons just up from the tropics. It means no more than the seven mile sweep of a sea island beach, where the sturdy palmettoes wave their fronds over the last strong lift of ocean: "This is America. No further." It means neither more nor less.

Yet Snuggedy Swamp is older than the Woolworth Building and perhaps more powerful. We who are alive may all paddle through its cypress arches in time, or, if the wish prefers it, climb our Berkshire hill or high Sierra. Drop houses where you will and stretch developments from Florida to Long Beach and back by way of California, you cannot subdue the singular nor keep the non-conformist eye to the geometry of a city block. We will use the apparatus of your civilization and thank progress for hot water and a safety razor and a car that follows the back country ruts, but we will not give up good talk, good thought, and Snuggedy Swamp if the majority itself in form of Beelzebub (whose name was legion) insists that the way of life is comfortable dullness and its object getting nowhere in particular in a terrible hurry. If the commonalty will not ask for ibises let them have Long Island duckling. No tripe for us. There is still balm in Gilead which only fastidiousness can appreciate. There would be no literature if they should drain all the Snuggedy Swamps.

v. *Back from Nature*

YET the intense love of wild nature which used to be a characteristic trait of the American books that were most American seems to be disappearing. It has made its mark on American literature, gathered indeed a nature literature for itself, on which at least one book<sup>1</sup> and many essays have been written, and it may be said that the honey which Thoreau sucked from the varied slopes of New England is the richest and most pungent of its kind. There is a passion in his rapt studies which makes the love passions of his contemporary New Englanders seem thin and cold. And not merely the enthusiast Muir and the pastoral Burroughs, but forgotten practitioners, like Abbott of New Jersey and Olive Thorne Miller, stir the imagination with the intensity of their obsession by wild life. A warbler, a hepatica, a hermit thrush, an islanded pine left from the great woods, have acquired for these foresters a quality which is less philosophic but more immediately human than the immanence of Wordsworth's daffodils. Such refinements upon wild nature as theirs represent perhaps the last mood of the rough romantic passion which had inspired the pioneers.

From Thoreau to Burroughs the course of this literature is plain. Afterward the decadence begins. Birds and animals in Thompson Seton and his many successors must live in story plots and dramatic adventures. The call of the wild is dramatized and becomes a spotlight upon weasel or goshawk, which turn to figures of heroic romance. It is no longer the wilderness as a means of expanding the soul, but sensation that interests. A swamp

<sup>1</sup> "Nature in American Literature." By Norman Foerster. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1926.

or a wild apple tree becomes universal in Thoreau; in the decadent books we look for a chase, a murder, an escape, a combat. At the end of the process is the bed-time story of an unnatural bunny and his friends.

Nature in literature has thus declined into sentimentalism, or gone into scientific description which lacks the imagination of "Walden" or of Muir on the high Sierras. So all good things rust, rot, or change, not necessarily for the ultimate worse. But the inevitable decay of moods and minds is not the only reason for our new distances with Mother Nature of the Wild. In this quick half century we have shifted from introspection to extraspection. Men like Thoreau were subjective to a degree only possible in a generation whose belief in the illimitable unity of the soul was still untouched by psychological doubt as to the nature of consciousness and the conditions of thought. It is himself that Thoreau would capture in the echoes of the thrush's song in a hemlock dusk, or the flame of a cardinal flower in the marsh. High pines, wild geese flying southward, the depths of clear lake water, upland pastures, the moose, the Indian, all summon the spirit from its reticences, and the experience is more real, because more vivid, than the routine of ordinary experience. Man is studying his own soul which, like the eremite's, steals out in solitude. It was true, for a while, of the American spirit, that it was most original in the woods.

Nature literature, then, was in a peculiar sense self-study. In England, the books of Jefferies, more rhapsodical and less revealing than the American writings, were also self questings, and no work of Rudyard Kipling's is so personal as "The Jungle Books." But in America wild nature meant more than beauty released or strangeness brought home to symbolize the ethics of a race. A literary interpretation was a liaison with a new continent, new

skies, new birds, new airs, new earth. It was a reminder in chosen words of that freedom to do and suffer and enjoy on the soil which generations of immigrants had found intoxicating. This was all that remained of the hope for a new man inspired by an untrammelled continent. The aspiration passed into Cooper and gave his romance a compelling quality which his literary crudities could not destroy; it passed into Emerson and Whitman. It is the subtle heart of nature literature.

Wild nature has not lost its powerful charm. The wilderness is still at suburban backdoors, still deep if no longer wide. But the mind has changed. We are all for analyzing now, all for groping in the minds of others. The contemplative mood has passed. It is the chemist with his test tube or the physicist with his ray who is the modern symbol of literature. We are too much interested in our neighbors' complexes, or our own inhibitions, to be concerned with expansion of soul. Wild nature can tell us nothing because even if wild nature moves us we believe that mere emotion is of no significance. It is not the soul's aspiration toward beauty but the mind's behavior under strain that is engrossing. By dint of looking at the inside of other's minds we have become curiously objective. "For this, for everything, we are out of tune" Wordsworth wrote a century too early. Only the spenders and the getters were out of tune for his nature, but even our poets have lost kinship with life outside the limits of a psychology predominantly behavioristic.

Perhaps we moderns have passed beyond the last impulse of the romantic movement, and for us souls must contract and clarify in order to be significant. Perhaps it is city living and too rapid transportation. In any case the golden cord is broken, and if we are to share the high solace of Emerson or Browning's rapture we must take it



in literature, not in experience with the external world. For such a contact we are no longer ready. The American West, where there is still an uplifting beauty of wilderness, is voiceless except for railway folders. The publicity man has succeeded Muir. As for New England, set a modern writer upon a hilltop and expect notes on dissociation, or a study of human moods, but never a literature in which nature is powerfully loved for the sake of the wild in man.

## VI. *Art in a City*

CITY living today, indeed, means more now than in that pleasant eighteenth century when Addison and Steele wrote themselves Londoners, or in that vaster London of Charles Lamb who was unhappy when too long out of hearing of Bow Bells. City living is synonymous today with industrialism, with standardization, with the speeding up of experience, with noise, cheap reading, and the mass mind. For those sensitive spirits which make literature it is both a stimulant and an irritant. The great machine may stir or dull them, its noise may shape the rhythms by which they paint or write or compose. And it may and does record for them a new philosophy of discordancy and incoherence.

The modern city has lost all balance and plan, and (says the modern artist) so has the life within it. It is a swarm in a disordered hive, with a serrated roof line symbolically presenting to the heavens the excited confusion beneath. Its government has little relation to its economics, its economics have little relation to the basic desires of its population, its beauties (and they are many) are accidental, its speed is toward uncalculated goals, life within it has sen-

sation without continuity, its best citizens are nervously overstrained, its thought is all expressed in movement, its crowds never move the same way together, it is always in a state of becoming, and while one feels that it may be magnificent when finished, there is scarcely a guess as to what that finish will be like.

A comparison with the criteria of the speculative sciences is pertinent. Matter we know to be in vivid motion, obeying inscrutable laws, and graspable as reality only in a state of constant change. The mind, according to the behaviorists, is only a series of quick movements in muscles and other tissue which are accompanied by sensation and give the illusion of continuous existence. The typical representational art of the moving pictures, an illusion of continuity, is a close parallel. An apparent incoherence in experience is forced upon us who live on the growing edge of the world, the cities, where a mere look down the street is enough to cast doubt upon Thomas Aquinas or render the ordered system of Calvin absurd.

It was different in the earlier cities; it is different in the country. God in his universe, a plan of evolution, a beginning, middle, and end in an orderly book, composition in a picture, the possibility of a disciplined, meaningful life, seem more probable in the midst of nature than in the face of men's achievements. An untouched forest arranges itself with an effect of ordered beauty which, after devastation, not fifty years will restore. A meadow bordered by dogwood gently inclining, shaded by island oaks, touched here, touched there, by the blue of Quaker ladies, run through with violets, is a document in harmony which the mind recognizes with grateful pleasure. Let a tree die and a vine drapes it, cut an entrance to the woods and the leaves will arch it over, the glaciers themselves have swept



in broad curves and noble lines over the New England hill tops.

Has this meaning? Is the incoherence of the back yard and the garage front significant? We do not profess philosophy. Perhaps nature reflects only the will-to-harmony of man, and the incoherence of modern life is the clutter of stone about an unfinished pyramid.

But how can you expect the artist to ignore his environment? The strange broken rhythm of Scriabin, repetitive, getting nowhere, is the music of a city; the unbalanced designs of futurists, substituting planes or distortions for the completed round, are city paintings. The experimental novels or experimental verse, in which ideas come by flashes as if sent by a mad signalman who no longer believes in his code, and events are just one sensation after another with no relation except implied futility, are city literature.

The lover of more harmonious times desires to take each industrialized artist by the scruff of his neck and deposit him in a grove of tulip poplars, on a hillside of cedar, or by the curve of a surf-beaten beach. But that is no cure, though if all follow the incoherent into Babel our case is sad indeed. For either life *is* incoherent, and science and the artists are just finding it out; or it is not, and we are on our way to discover what underlies the clash of electrons. In any case the city artists must go through with their pain (and ours). If they are merely confused by the clatter about them—and that is the criticism to be made upon a good deal of modern literature—why, so much the worse for their art. If they retire to cowslips and trout pools because they will not face the city—why, so much the worse for their service to humanity. We cannot have New York, Chicago, Paris, and London and not write

about, or paint them. The real artists will struggle with this new urbanization as they struggled with the Greek idea and the Christian philosophy. They are not responsible for their world, but only for what they make of it—for the strength, the skill, the subtlety, the beauty, most of all the integrity of their reactions.

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## PERSONS AND PERSONALITIES

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### I. *He Carried On*

"The last great Englishman is low"

HE was more fortunate than Milton who lived on amid rash and bavin wits that mocked him. The young men praised Thomas Hardy, and although his work had gone on for three generations, they visited him with respect, read his last poems with enthusiasm. His genius was both timely and timeless, the one perhaps because of the other. He was the only Victorian who spoke for both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

But Hardy was first of all a great Victorian. His religion was moral earnestness, and without moral earnestness his great novels—"Tess of the D'Urbervilles," "The Return of the Native," "Jude the Obscure," and his dramatic epic "The Dynasts" would undate themselves and him. His pessimism, which makes Browning's self-assured confidence seem rash and light, was a moral pessimism shot through with pity. His vision of a ruthless and arbitrary President of the Immortals, so different from the easy Providence that solved the typical Victorian novel, is only an extension of nineteenth century earnestness. What mattered in his stories and his poetry alike was not behaviorism but God. If he called God by a realist's name, refused

to make his Judes, his Eustacias, his Tesses live and die by a moral code, and so offended his own contemporaries and endeared himself to youth in rebellion, that did not make him less a contemporary of Tennyson, Arnold, Huxley, and Meredith. His interests were identical with theirs, though his conclusions were so different.

In this last decade of his life the old man at Max Gate was like a monolith of Salisbury plain surrounded by the gimcrack and artifice of a new era. He must have respected his followers less than they him and yet it is certain that he loved them and read their books. The post-War England of light cynicism, of clever boudoir literature, of intellectual poetry fine and fragile as a steel drill, the England afraid to think except in terms of science, and asking no questions of the future, where to be in earnest except in facts was demoded and life was lived for its comforts, must have seemed to him a strange spectacle, to him who took more satisfaction in the earnestness of a Wessex peasant than in erudition and valued Jude's tragedy of intellectual ambition more than a sophisticate's weariness of life.

But Hardy gave no sign. The War, we know, distressed him. It was too big and too mechanical for human values. In the true Victorian sense, it was not interesting because it threatened to become meaningless. And yet the concern of modern England in getting on, and its belief that moral values are so much bunk and *savoir vivre* the only philosophy, did not embitter him. It is incredible that he was unaware of these alien modes, for young men and poets—men particularly who had been wounded to the soul by their war experiences—kept near to him. And even in his eighties he wrote on undisturbed in verse that now was as different from the modern note in its moral preoccupations as it had been different from the verse of his

Victorian contemporaries in its sober realism, its determinant philosophy, and its style of heightened prose.

There would have been little use in asking Thomas Hardy why he alone of all his generation kept in sympathy with a present which had nearly destroyed his past. One doubts if his answer would have been relevant. But we can guess and with some assurance. For like Milton fallen on troublous times, but with the clearer view of the realist philosopher, he had only to wait for such interests as his to renew their power. If we are bored by the moral problems of human nature and excited only by the revelation of the strength of instinct or the mechanics of mental behavior, that is not because there are no moral problems or because psychology is the solution to every plot. Back to the moral problems of the type Victorians we shall presumably never go, but then Hardy was not interested in the terms which Gladstone or Tennyson set upon their philosophies. He shared their earnestness but not their prejudices. And himself untroubled by prejudice, the cynical iconoclasts, the eager materialists of the twentieth century must have seemed to him actors in an interlude of his world tragedy, where Consequences played their little scene until Causes should again sweep on into the great drama of the human Will.

Thomas Hardy is the Victorian that carried on. He is our link with a past that for all its errors is the foundation of whatever idealism we still possess, and his enduring influence with a generation so alien to the confident England of his youth, is a sign for the future that the thoughtful cannot disregard. As a man of letters I do not attempt to assess him here, although whether his personal influence will last depends upon questions of art rather than philosophy. But as a voice of England, and indeed of the Anglo-Saxon world, which, diverse in breed

and manners, is still a cultural whole, this novelist and poet reminds us that when the captains of industry and the kings of trade depart the prophet in the wilderness will still be questioning God.

## II. *Amy Lowell*

WE LOST by the death of Amy Lowell not only a poet and critic of astonishing virility, but (when we could least afford it) a great personality.

Miss Lowell belonged to the family of Dr. Johnson. Her personality was never recessive. There are writers, like Shakespeare, or Edward Fitzgerald, or Herman Melville—to gather together a miscellaneous group—whose rich inner life never seems to have reached full coruscation except in marriage with the written word. If you look for them, seek them not in biographies, but in their works. But sometimes genius is too full-blooded, too immediate to wait upon composition. It pours over urgently into life, which in its vicinity takes on livelier colors and sparkles with electricity like October air. The first run with such literary personalities is sometimes the best. They may make fine prose or great poetry; but nothing quite recaptures the vivid enthusiasm of voice and gesture, the play of a highly charged imagination running free. Dr. Johnson was such a personality, Charles Lamb another, and Miss Lowell belongs in their company. She would have held the Doctor at bay, and Elia would have stammered as he shaped epigrams to toss into the flow of her talk.

This age is too inhibited to breed many like her. We are tender of each other's feelings for fear of violent reactions. We are afraid to air experimental opinions lest they prove unsound. Skeptics and cynics are as common as

weeds in a pasture, but they have no convincing scholarship, no confident force, and are more likely to make faces at society than to attack by strong argument. When they take poetry, or anything else, seriously, they will ape the reticences and amenities of mediocrity rather than be caught with an opinion.

There was not an ounce of mediocrity in Amy Lowell. She lived as she saw fit, exercised her privileges with aristocratic disregard, kept her brains sharp as naturally as lesser folk keep their faces clean, and was always willing to spend her whole self on what was for her the whole business of living—creation, criticism, controversy. Her "Keats" is a magnificent outpouring of unmeasured effort. It is diffuse, and that is its fault, but not because of lapses into dullness. Into every aspect, even the most trivial, she charged with head high and eyes sparkling, never sparing either herself or her documents. Her chapters are sometimes overloaded, but always alive, and often triumphant.

It was Miss Lowell who gave morale to the renaissance of American poetry in the early nineteen hundreds. She injected vigor and excitement, and made its creed of fresh imagery and new rhythms seem important, as indeed it was. Critics differ as to the future of her own poetry. All agree that it is original and stimulating; all agree that its intellectual edge is keen, its emotions vivid, and, where the mind is involved, passionate. But pressed further, their opinions blur and break into confusion. There have been a score of essays on Amy Lowell's verse, and not one definitive.

So it is with all great literary personalities of the immediate sort. Their voice and manner are so dominant as one reads that the poetry becomes too personal for definition. It may be overestimated easily; it may be underestimated almost as easily, because the ringing voice of the



controversialist sounds too idiosyncratic for permanence. The readers of Amy Lowell have read her poetry with their critical senses aroused, aware that they were in the presence of a dominating mind which they must either yield to, or resist. Now that she can talk to us no longer, we shall perhaps read her better, seeking for the poet, rather than the critic and the friend.

But if her power over verse had been, like Dr. Johnson's, ordinary instead of extraordinary, Miss Lowell would still have been a luminous figure in this age. Her personality was in itself a magnum opus, and her brilliant instigations, which never deserved so gross a term as influence, have awakened the intellectual being of others as skillful as she, though never so magnificently human. She was not only poetical, but the cause of poetry in others. She, as well as her poetry, will take a place in American literature, and that is a tribute few can expect.

### III. *H. L. Mencken*

THE effect of our American scene upon this generation of serious thinkers is curious. As surely as it made an optimist of Emerson, it makes pessimists of them. As surely as it made boasters and blow-hards in the nineteenth century, it makes deprecators and satirists in the twentieth.

Mr. Mencken, for example, has become a Federalist, in mind if not in manners. His enemies think that he collects horrid examples of stupidity, obscurantism, tyranny, spite, and prejudice in his "Americana" in order to undermine government, destroy the home, and ridicule our institutions. This is neither his purpose nor his achievement. He says in a preface that his anecdotes of science-baiting,

miracle mongering, besotted patriotism, and muddled reform are much more than amusing, they are worthy of serious study. And if you study these marvelous anecdotes of incredible naïveté, what do you find? A perfect transcript of the humors and the weaknesses of democracy. These quaint people who believe that civilization begins and ends in Abilene, Texas, who denounce all opinions but their own, who reform everything and everybody but themselves—all this delightful mixture of vanity, enthusiasm, provincialism, and obstinacy is what the New Englanders so detested in the back-country followers of Thomas Jefferson, is a replica of the mob mutterings and vaporings of the Jackson Democrats who broke John Quincy Adams's heart and sent him back to the intelligentsia mourning that the democracy would surely destroy the land. It is the voice of the common mind that so annoys Mr. Mencken. Like all conservatives, from Alexander Hamilton to Mussolini, he would keep power out of the hands of the "boobs."

It may seem strange to call Mr. Mencken a conservative. But what is a conservative but a man who fights against the trend of events? The crass fools whose speech and doings he recounts are in control. Whether dry Republicans, Ku-Klux-Klanners, Methodists, Baptists, rotarians, university presidents, bankers, they are the trend. Mencken is fighting, as the Federalists fought, against the evolution of our brand of democracy. It seemed an incredible thing to them that common persons of no property, no education, no manners, and no responsibility should control a government. It seems outrageous to him that a middle class of little education, small intelligence, fixed ideas, and unlovely habits should run America and possess most of our wealth.

But we survived Jeffersonism and Jacksonism, and we

shall unquestionably survive the "booberies" that he goads and lashes. The lawless, ruffian frontiersmen who lived in squalor and were never content until they overthrew decent government and drove the gentleman and scholar out of politics, are precisely those pioneers whom at the moment we find so romantic, and who, according to historians, are the really important factor in American history. Presumably the bourgeoisie who now are riding upon America into an undreamed-of prosperity will in some later, poorer age be celebrated also as epic heroes of a commercial prime. Their stupidities forgotten, their powerful energy will become glamorous. Some Mencken of the future will recall bitterly the dauntless, obstinate puritans and ruthless Rotarian heroes of 1925.

Mr. Mencken, like all conservatives, all satirists, and most historians, suffers from a too narrowly focussed imagination. Since he cannot see the other side of the moon, he assumes that there is no other side. If his summary of the various States as corrupt, ignorant, malicious, cowlike, or hypocritical resembled the truth, our civilization would not last long enough for him to publish another volume.

The "boobs" will get him in the end, as soon or late they overcome all prophesying by intellectuals who wish the human race to proceed by reason and formula. Such honest, if malicious, conservatives as he, are congenitally incapable of seeing a great principle working out in the disorderly and unlovely movement of American civilization. They smite the inevitable with swords and see disaster in every incident of social evolution. We may be headed for a cliff, but we are not for that reason swine, to be estimated solely as such. Those Gadarene pigs would have equally infuriated the swineherd whether they ran for the sea or the mountains.

The lumbering march of democracy goes on, the mob

and masters of the mob, toward what end who knows? But with each year a little more comfort, a little more power, a little more opportunity to be a fool, or a knave, or a civilized individual, comes to the average, commonplace man. Round its columns the light-armed troopers ride, picking off a stupid one now and then, and raining bright darts on unprotected and unconscious backs. They cannot stop the human race; they can only harass; without them we would be more fatuous, more vain, duller; but with or without them we go on where our humanity, not their reason, calls us.

#### IV. *Christopher Morley*

SOME day, far off I trust, a younger critic will have to tighten his belt to that mood of impartial constriction in which unbiased criticism is made. I hope that he succeeds, as I hope always that the truly scientific critic will attain that nirvana of abstraction in which literature is assessed without prejudice and without loss of the highly personal impressions which alone seem to make criticism alive and enduringly useful beyond its facts. This is the critic's dilemma—either he knows too much or feels too little of his subject—and until a greater than Aristotle tells us how to avoid it, books on esthetics will too often be more interesting in theory than useful in practice.

No such dilemma confronts me in writing of Christopher Morley as a friend, with admitted bias, with that dangerous sympathy that comes from hearing a man's voice in his works. And I choose to do so, in part, because the detestable practice of professional "blurbing" has put a shame upon friendly appreciation which Charles Lamb never knew. When many are paid to praise, the friend

stands aloof. And this is unfortunate, since in the sum total of criticism there are insights which may come only to one not over-critical, who can say:

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice  
And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath seal'd thee for herself—

It is not the whole of criticism, yet it is an essential part.

There has been abundant comment, friendly and unfriendly, favorable and unfavorable, critical and blatant, upon the writings of Christopher Morley, but little which seems to me to approach his green escape by its open door. He has been dismissed with the easy name of humorist, whereas his humor is only the bubbling over of a rich nature which, without his joy in living, might have taken tragedy for its issue. He has been labeled stylist, and set on a shelf by those who adore literary language without due discrimination between that passionate love of English which has given him power when, like George in "Thunder on the Left," he has his Great Moments, and those junketings with fine words which this drunkard in vocabularies will sometimes indulge in. For Christopher Morley is not one stylist, he is three. A master of lovely, supple English, lifting in the presence of beautiful emotion to a superb prose—that is Morley the First and Best. Then there is Morley II, a bad boy of letters, a punster without restraint, whimsical, witty, using the oldest tricks as well as the newest inventions. This is the journalist Morley, good, but too puckish to last. And finally, Morley III, Morley writing style, Jacobean, Johnsonian, Lambish, Stevensonian, exerting his great talent for rhythm and word as a euphuist or antiquary, writing brave language a little too fine—there I like him least. It is the best genius that controls in "Thunder on the Left," in "Where the

Blue Begins," in "Inward Ho!" in the best of his "Translations from the Chinese," and some of his other poetry. Puck Morley I would not forego, though I cannot always praise him; as for the stylist, it is a law of the world that the feathered cock should strut now and then, and what cock of letters has not, Shakespeare with Ophelia, Ruskin over his Venetians, Emerson when he remembered the pulpit from which he was hatched.

To discuss any writer as a stylist, outside of a rhetoric, is a ticklish business; it is too much like describing an egg by its shell. Nor is there much illuminating criticism of humor or humorists as such. A man is not humorous—really humorous—because he wants to be; he may fabricate his wit, but his humor, as the medieval psychologists knew, comes from an excess of some quality seeking relief.

The excess in Christopher Morley is love of living, and by a natural transference of interest, every manifestation of intense living in others. His virtues do not spring directly from his own vitality, for while love of living can make a man fervid, tolerant, expansive in his observation, it cannot make him an artist, and may (and sometimes does in Morley's case) result in boisterousness, diffusion, over-ripeness of imagery, ornateness of style. And yet his virtues are all magnified, and, in a sense, defined, by this passionate gusto for experience.

And love of living as a passion is precisely the quality which this mechanical world of the twentieth century most often and emphatically lacks. I do not refer to the outcries of the "life is hell" school of literary expressionists, who complain that science and prosperity have not done away with pain and despair. Yet surely not the most confirmed praiser of the present would maintain that we taste, bite, chew, and swallow life with the eagerness of the Elizabethans, the heartiness of Dr. Johnson, even with the



delight of Charles Lamb. It is significant that men no longer weep when they rejoice, nor find in their poetry the eloquence of a Wordsworth to express the intensity of their sensations:

—I cannot paint  
What then I was. The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion.

I do not mean to describe Christopher Morley as a man born out of his time. He can be as modern as Joyce when his perceptions are on the alert, although his pose of an ancient hearty (of which the heartiness is no pose) may deceive the uninitiate. Yet in this respect of vital enthusiasm he inherits a faculty biologically conditioned out of most of our writing race.

I write in memory of personal contacts—the mirth of the man, his capacity for mighty friendships, his wide-ranging curiosity, his red-faced indignations, his tireless enthusiasms—never measured nor repressed—for beauty of action, or word, or tower rising in the sunset sky of New York. But the tide of his abundant life flows through his work where all may feel it. Sometimes it is like the tide of his own beloved harbor of New York, encumbered with flotsam and jetsam, the scums and the derelicts of emotion, where he sees more beauty or humor than the most charitable can allow, yet the insweep from the greater ocean is always pulsing beneath. Even in his lesser, though much-loved volumes, like “The Haunted Book Shop,” the love of books gets such a transmutation into words as it would be hard to find elsewhere; and in his trivialities—for like all literary journalists, Morley will be trivial rather than not write at all—there is a sparkle of electric current along the wires of conventional plots which half redeems the artifice. But in the work that is

really his own, in which meditation has ripened the fruits of living—in some of his poetry, but most of all in the prose of his “Inward Ho!” and in the narrative of “Thunder on the Left,” there is a beauty, grave yet vibrant, when his excess pours into the sufficient tranquillity of art. I think of that exquisite passage of Phyllis bathing, or of the dusk when “like fluid privacy the shadow rose and flowed restfully about them; faces were exempt from scrutiny; eyes, those timid escapers from question, could look abroad at ease. Reprieved from angers and anxieties, the mind yearned to come home under the roof of its little safe identity. . . . Come home, come home to yourself, cried the incessant voice of darkness.” I remember the humane and humorous narrative of Mr. Gissing in his department store; Conrad and the Reporters; the wise pungency of “Inward Ho!”

For literature, in some moods, is a very hollow voice. What is the virtue and service of a book? Only to help me to a more genuine realization of myself, to live less gingerly and shabbily. If it has done that, away with it; I have no wish to see it again. Sometimes, late at night, I see the damned things stacked up in tormenting rows, mere bricks of paper, and say I'd throw them all into the furnace gladly for the kingdom, power and glory of pouring out my own heart. They are only useful as a consolation for that stark dumbness and terror that comes upon one phiz-à-phiz with life itself.

Critical appreciation in this age of the exaltation of the commonplace has gone to a different kind of talent—to ruthless expositions of mean desires and animal impulses, and to skillful virtuosos on the cynical side who can make brilliant pictures of dull, dirty lives. But I think that the popularity of Christopher Morley is based upon a sound instinct for joy and pathos, sentiment and beauty, in the

nobler varieties of humanity, which after all have their place even in a democracy of neurotics, schizoids, morons, and the emotionally unstable. The great grip upon the sweets of living of a Falstaff, who could say, "I have more flesh than other men, and therefore more frailty," is quite incomprehensible in a tabloid, a novel by Dreiser, or the columns of a sophisticated weekly, but not to Christopher Morley and those who love him.

Like all men whose superabundance finds relief in humor, Morley is sometimes sententious, and it is this that has given him a reputation for philosophical obscurity in his more serious work that he does not merit. The conclusion of "Thunder on the Left" puzzled many with its suggestion of a great mystery, and the metempsychosis of men into dogs in "Where the Blue Begins" was given a weight of possible meaning which it does not deserve. Morley is not a symbolist like Eugene O'Neill, nor yet a philosophic critic as Cabell would be, nor a social thinker like Shaw or Wells. He is the Quaker in literature, a very different and not uncommon phenomenon. He has the inner light, which means no dogmatic certainty of explanation, no great subtlety, but rather a radiant conviction of significance in the universe, and a constant power of refreshment at its central, spiritual fires. To such a man—as to Emerson—it is not necessary to reason the power of beauty, the joy of friendship, for he has them, he feels them, they are possessed. And hence all formalism, every restriction upon the full-flowing possibilities of life, is an enemy to be attacked as jocosely as the fly on the window pane. Morley's villains are always dead men—ossified bishops, business hacks, belittlers, the predacious, mean creatures who have lost their souls.

This is the tragedy of "Thunder on the Left," and its

major theme. Those children who leave by the author's will their plane of time and are projected into a possible adulthood, what happens while they live in an inevitable but not yet existent future? The pathos of it is too terrible. Martin, their messenger, who is to go back to his own time, must not know all. He must not know of the cruel accidents, meaningless by any philosophy, which punish life for living; but he cannot escape the penalties of growth in an adult world—the soul that is sucked out of Ben by a soulless wife, the mind of George divided and struggling between loyalties, Joyce who might have loved him and cannot, Phyllis who loves too late. In this book, the best that he has written, and one of the best books, I think, in recent fiction, in spite of the tricky mechanics of the end, there is no subtle philosophy, but only the deep conviction that life takes with one hand what it gives with the other, and that safety lies only in loving life and hating the lifeless.

One begins to see why, his quips and cranks aside, Morley writes only of Moral Man. I do not mean man with a moral, or man that behaves morally, for this author's revision of the Ten Commandments would, I fear, exclude him from any sect except the Stoics or the Epicureans, between which I see him wavering with a mug of beer in one hand and a New Testament in the other. It is in man with a moral sense that Morley is interested, in all-too-human man, excessive man, amorous man, Gargantuan man, man fully equipped with throat, stomach, and all his organs, functioning on a high-power current, full of ozone, rich in vitamins, the natural man of the theologians, who yet is aware of self-control, conscious of duty, desirous of beauty spiritual as well as beauty physical, pathetically determined to live like Wordsworth's Happy Warrior, not as Caliban or as Mr. Dreiser's or Mr. Ander-

son's self-accommodating heroes. This is another radiation from Morley's inner light, and it is his demon, his control. It sets him among that rare company which the sparse and lean of the world have always distrusted and mere loose livers rightly disliked—the Ben Jonsons, Shakespeares, Goethes, Whitmans, who dare to open arms to all of life and yet will not take all life in. It is not caution—that is the morale of another kind of man—but a resultant of can and cannot in desires that may neither be reconciled nor excluded. Philosophy we do not get from such men (except Goethe), but from the greatest, unforgettable examples of what life may be that are more vital than life itself, and from lesser men, a brave imagination that throbs with the blood of eager existence and yet is aware of the flaming sword.

I am using these great instances to explain the complexion of Morley's mind. Yet that mind has its own individuality, and in nothing more than in its attitude toward man—and woman. Christopher Morley is a man's man by choice, one would say. His companionship outside his own country dwelling is among men. Men drink and talk and laugh with him; he was, they said at college, a rake among scholars, a scholar among rakes; he is not to be found at literary teas or dinners of the intelligentsia. Look for him rather in back offices where pipe smoke reeks, at round tables behind closed doors, or setting the room aroar while the host's wife upstairs fears for her best china. Yet women love him and his works. They are his best readers; they forgive him the puns not made for them or his relapses into the humors of Thomas Hood, and they encourage his occasional sentimentalism, when, his love of life's phenomena become a little groggy, he sweeps all the scenery to his eager breast.

And they are right. For Morley is a novelist of women more than men. His men are variants of his own divided and questing spirit, such as George Granville and Mr. Gissing, or they are viewed as friends expansively carried to the full sympathy of that name; "kinsprits" he calls them, who reach his imagination because they share both his gusto and his restraints. Hence as a maker of complex male characters, or as a biographer of "kinsprits," he is limited. From him you get a Conrad, a Whitman that is not the whole man, though certainly his richest part, a hero in his capacity of friend of all the world, scarcely a character, seldom a portrait. Men, Christopher Morley can do when their auras are visible, when the light they shine with is his also.

But women he knows with a deeper intuition, and more power of objective realization. He does not, I think, know much about many women, but those that he takes into his imagination come there whole and with both spirit and flesh about them. Dead women—dead for him because the love of life has gone out of them or is inhibited—he neither likes nor understands; but if, as with Phyllis in "Thunder on the Left," they are all too human in body and still vital in soul, then he has perceptions transmissible into language which are better than all the analyses in the world. Like all males who love experience, he is afraid of them (as of no man), and indeed, to understand and to sympathize one has to be a little afraid. The familiarity of the ruthless psychologist sees too much for synthesis. Indeed, as a creative artist, busy with flesh and blood rather than with meditation, Morley's future would seem to concern itself with women and men caught by their own rich impulses in the web of circumstance and struggling like George and Joyce and Phyllis not against



each other, but toward the inner light. And it is because he loves life so manifested as well as the joy of living, that Morley is an artist.

Well, a friend can say more for Christopher Morley, but he can say no less. An enemy might say differently; he might urge a promise of greatness still meager with only three or four books in a handsome set of red that argue a life long enough to be worthy of the college from which it takes its name; an enemy might say that he is too eager to open the world's oysters by dozens, too ready to clap sentiment on the back and daff realities aside; and yet, I believe that even a less friendly critic than I would have to subscribe to his abounding vitality and his happy moments of admirable art.

#### *v. James Branch Cabell*

MR. CABELL has added one more branch—or shall we say fig leaf—to the Jurgen saga, which now rises (to use his own imagery) like some phallic monument in a South Sea Isle to such a height and such an elaboration as to demand the closest critical scrutiny. For either Mr. Cabell is ironically teasing the dullness of his contemporaries by saying the same thing over and over again in different wordings, or he has produced the most extensive philosophy of human nature in fiction that this supposedly unphilosophical country can boast. His admirers say that he is the greatest of living stylists in English; his enemies say that he is indecent, and, what is worse, repetitive, diffuse, and often dull. There is an irreconcilable conflict between the two groups which only a cold-blooded analysis of his forthcoming Works can resolve. That he is a stylist the prices of his first editions would seem to prove, were

it not that the highest priced books seem to be those against which charges of indecency (often foolish ones) have been brought. That he is a philosopher has been asserted without much consideration of his philosophy.

I cannot, in the limited space of these pages, pretend to analyze the works of Mr. Cabell; yet his recent book, "Something About Eve," is in many ways an epitome of the whole. Its leading characters have appeared before, either in their own names or in ancestral prototypes or spiritual relatives. Its new figures are more of the same series of dramatized myths and symbols that enlivened "Jurgen," its methods, its ideas, its solution, are all admirably Cabellian. I shall not be unfair if, in discussing "Something About Eve," I discuss Mr. Cabell also.

Let us, like Gerald Musgrave in the story, take off the rose-colored glasses which Mr. Cabell's graceful English polished to the last preposition has placed upon so many critical noses, and look with all the coolness possible at this story of a jaunt in search of the kingdom of romance.

Thus regarded, Mr. Cabell's book is revealed as an inverted Emersonian essay, written with the ironical purpose of a Voltaire, but in a style of allusive rhetoric which romanticists can enjoy but the eighteenth century would have repudiated. It is a pilgrim's progress through the realms of sex in which the hero who seeks a higher truth evidently prefers and often practices a lower one. Its theme—that sex rules the world—is trite, though there are new things to say about it, and Mr. Cabell says some of them, but the pungency of the book is not in the ironies of its subject, or in its felicities of description, for they alone would grow tiresome long before the end, nor even in certain phantasies of wit and charm; no, the "punch" of this book is in the realities, usually phallic, which Mr. Cabell's *doubles entendres* describe. So cleverly are they

hidden that the reader may say with Falstaff of his hostess, "She's neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her." But if Mr. Cabell should reply with the hostess, "Thou art unjust man in saying so; thou, or any man knows where to have me," one can only respond, yes, Mr. Cabell, on second and careful reading, we certainly do.

The idea of the book is not original. Gerald Musgrave, the hero, is a clear-eyed sensualist who suffers nevertheless from romantic illusions. Mr. Cabell makes a rather feeble attempt to present him as a hundred per cent American who is never shocked by reality so long as it is not called by its right name. But Gerald is much too knowing to be naïve, and much too romantic to be sentimental. The code of his Protestant Episcopal community has made a stale adultery of which he is weary his permanent occupation. When a convenient Sylvan, longing for human contacts, obligingly changes bodies with him, Gerald sets out on a steed of ideal hopes for Antan where wishes come true. He is stirred on to prove that copulation is not the whole end of existence, that there is a higher truth, and this purpose saves him (when convenient) from the sexual temptations which meet him, paragraph by paragraph, on his way. His course, indeed, is outwardly decorous, and nothing could be proved against him and his elegant diction either in the book or in a court of law. He is never "un-American," as Mr. Cabell constantly repeats.

And yet for all his clear eyes one romantic illusion he cannot pass. Sex in its last and most deadly form, domesticity, succeeds where lighter loves have failed. Eve, the eternal wife, is too much for him. The female principle in its connubial form, with supplements of a kindly humor, a home, and a child, block the way to Antan. Christian escaped from them, but not Gerald Musgrave. He gives up the higher truth, and when his son proves to be not

only an illusion but a devil able to destroy all ideals which a lover of the higher truth might set before himself in art or the altruisms and hope to achieve if undistracted, and Eve herself becomes merely sex without disguise, why then there is nothing left desirable for so disillusioned a gentleman but to come home and study scientifically these phallic powers that rule the world. As a matter of fact, that is just what the Sylvan had been doing in his absence, and we leave Gerald busy with the ethnology of eroticism as the only sane occupation for a man too old to love.

Now it needs no Cabell come out of Lichfield in Virginia to tell us that sex is a dominant factor, nor even that wives are the enemies of romantic longings for ideal greatness. The idea is trite, and only a new grace in the telling or a new and provocative subject matter could justify another story on such a theme. And it needs more of a philosopher than Mr. Cabell to prove copulation, live in youth or dead in history, is the primal urge, the final duty, the last satisfaction. Indeed it is palpably false; especially as Mr. Cabell applies it.

It is as false as to say that money is the root of all evil. It is absurd except as a protest against some stale and hypocritical Victorianism that denies the sex instinct and suppresses its manifestations. It is quite as wrong-headed as Tennyson's opposite treatment of much the same set of idealistic ponderings in his "Idylls of the King," where, just as the barbarians were once made responsible for everything that happened to the Roman Empire, so the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere is harped upon as the be-all and cause-all of every crack and molder in Arthur's kingdom. It is particularly absurd in "Something About Eve" which by constant reference and implication is clearly intended as a kind of "Babbitt" to be applied freely to Cabell's own America.

Whatever are the roots of evil in America, the sole root is not sex. In our vast bourgeoisie such vital forces as love lose some of their power for either good or evil. It is not eroticism or its suppression that destroys the ideals of Antan in America, it is not even, to judge from the divorce courts, the delights of wedded bliss. Physical comfort, the power of money, the nervous excitement of strenuousness, the material success indispensable to people on the rise and on the make, are so clearly the great enemies of idealism in America that to describe us as a race of sentimentalists bedeviled by sex and the wifely clasp is like shooting at Paris to hit Berlin. Why, then, should a leisured and thoughtful writer go out of his way to affix his label of pessimistic phallicism where it so clearly will not stick? Why all this ado about male and female organs and their moral for hundred per cent Americans? Why such an unmitigated dose of phallicism anyway; and why so much fine writing on so shallow and so ugly a theme?

The answer springs to the lips. We know the history of Mr. Cabell's literary career. We remember the silly persecution of "Jurgen" in the courts, the attempt to prove that innocents would be corrupted by language they could not be innocent and understand. We know that he was told by gentlemen who believe that indecency is a question of words, that he must not mention the ultimate cause of population in terms which could have any provable reference to their subject. We know, in short, that Mr. Cabell's desire for expression came into conflict with his environment, and was somewhat rudely suppressed. And it is good psychology to suppose that the warping of a simple theme in "Something About Eve," the obsession with the erotic, the incredible ingenuity in describing physical phenomena, some of which the stalwart would certainly have "quitted with disdain," are due to his sup-

pressions. He is an oppressed American who displays the expected manifestations.

Not altogether. He thinks that he is suppressed, for, indeed, no one can stop him in his present subtlety and no one will try. He accepts Mr. Van Wyck Brooks's idea of the rigors of the American environment and is sure that he is one of the victims. He is a wronged man who will strike back. Therefore he writes of unmentionable things with impeccable, ironic elegance, which is engaging at first by its virtuosity, but becomes tiresome when the ugly monotony of what he chiefly describes pushes through the veil of diction and destroys the wit. His protest becomes pathological and suffers in its art. A deal of cleverness could be exerted in touching up the operations of a slaughter house, but if the adventurer in words should feel a moral duty to exhaust the unpleasant possibilities of his subject, the blood, the offal, the smell would come through his style, and pleasure would be turned off as by an electric switch. So here.

Mr. Cabell, the true Mr. Cabell, not the oppressed personality, but the romantic-ironic artist, comes to life here, as in "Jurgen," when he touches upon chivalry, when he delves in the wiles of woman nature, when he blends his irony with his romanticism in a hero and calls him Jurgen or Musgrave. He is excellent when he satirizes the furniture of our minds as in that famous heaven in "Jurgen," or the excellent domestic illusions of Eve in this book. He has a marvelous faculty for dramatizing myths and for handling symbols. Poe had it. John Erskine has it, and may have borrowed a little from Cabell. Perhaps the poignancy of the old figures in the new imaginative soil of an American mind accounts for the freshness of Erskine's Helen, of Cabell's Nero, Tannhäuser, Odysseus. I take the greatest delight in Mr. Cabell's Satan. Indeed, the



man can illuminate history, and he can write like a fallen angel when the theme justifies wit or wisdom and does not invite concealment. He is not to be set apart from the important writers of the day because his condition has become pathological. But he must not think that, in the words of the enchanter in this book, he is regarded as "a decadent small boy who is proud of having been haled into the police court for chalking dirty words on a wall." It is not pride but a sense of injury that makes the trouble. This small boy has been spending his valuable energies in inventing new words that are dirty without seeming to be. His phallicism, as ornate and elaborate as decadent Gothic architecture, which, once you have the key, overwhelms you with the physical image to the destruction of the idea, is but a fingering of the nose at the public and the authorities. I sympathize with the impulse but deplore the effects upon his art.

Indeed, it is quite possible that Mr. Cabell is an artist upon whom the American environment has not borne heavily enough. He has written in an ivory tower which has been only once (and then ignominiously) assaulted by the barbarians without. He has cultivated a style which, though repetitive, diffuse, and precious, is yet more carefully finished and more literary in the narrow sense than that of any American contemporary. Furthermore, although too clogged and self-conscious to be a good style, it has undoubted passages of beauty and clear effusions of wit. Hence, after a period of obscurity not long for a man of letters to endure, he has become the darling of those who savor fastidious English upon their tongue. He has never had to write for the multitudes, he has never had to be spare of literary allusions, he has never had to be inventive of themes or plots. He has been able to put his energies into the refinement of words and the elaboration

of phrase, and he has been read for his style, for his variants upon a witty irony turned or repeated in book after book, and, though not always by the same people, for his ornate eroticisms.

Now we needed some piquant indecency, needed it for our moral health which had been sicklied by a mealy diet of magazine reticence, and it is my regret not that Mr. Cabell is Rabelaisian on occasions, but that, unlike Rabelais, he has been driven, or thinks he has been driven, to make a pose of his indecencies, to sophisticate them, elaborate them, conceal them, play with them, until it is not the human quality but the craftsmanship, not the humor but the challenging fact, not the truth but the exhibitionism, which asks for attention.

And certainly we need stylists, writers with a sense of the rich allusive value of words, who are willing to ponder expression until what they say says twice, once to the mind, once to the imagination. There have been many such and it is they whose books stay fresh in literature. But they have not lived by words alone. Their style has been the outward sign of an inner grace and fertility of mind. Mr. Cabell has taken his ideas too easily. He has never been pressed beyond a few themes, said and resaid in many variations for a band of admirers who have applauded each reappearance of an old thought. It is as if Dr. Johnson had written a dozen "Rasselases," substituting a mountain for a valley or a poem for an oration. It is like a revue revamped.

The police have been stupid with Mr. Cabell for it is outrageous to regard his mischievous sallies as dangerous to public morals; but his own readers have been too kind. They have demanded more of the same, they have applauded *doubles entendres* as the substance when they should have been only the salt of his books. He needed

criticism, chiefly self-criticism, and his powers of analysis show that he is capable of taking and using it. He should have been urged to write not merely another, but a new, book.

I believe that Mr. Cabell's difficulties, so far as they originate in himself, come from his romanticism. He is a romantic born in a period of realism, and developing inevitably the self-conflict that Scott escaped but not Shakespeare, which made Stevenson often miserable and sometimes empty, and which Anatole France mastered only because the romanticism in him was weak. It is a delicate and difficult struggle where ideals conflict with philosophic conclusions or crude experience, and it may result in an irony so fine and so lovely that we hasten to greet the author as the intellectual savior of those who, loving neither Ariel nor Caliban, seek a new spirit which in gross times flies in rarer air than ours. Cabell has the gift of such irony, and it is clear from his critical writing, as well as from his novels, that it springs from a disillusionment with romantic idealism which has become almost complete, while his taste for romance remains as strong as ever. But this struggle must be self-concluded, is subject to accident, warps readily toward the incoherent (as often in Shelley), or the precious, or the gross. Cabell in his ivory tower has been trifled with, has been misunderstood. His philosophic digestion has been upset, his course toward a solution of the romanticists' problem has been interrupted by prudes who objected to his discoveries. Strike back, said his friends, and striking back he has wasted on ingenious obscenity energies which might have gone into invention and the pruning of a luxuriant style. Once off his course the stylist has betrayed the man, and he has exhausted in polish of phrase and skill of circumlocution an originality capable of another "Jurgen," which would

not be "Jurgen" over again, nor yet a clever tweaking of decency's nose by a talented gentleman who has lost his temper.

## VI. *Outline of a Journalist*

IF YOU search modern history you will not discover a more seemingly incongruous couple than Ralph Waldo Emerson and Herbert George Wells. Arm in arm in the Elysian fields they would awaken laughter, and it is hard to decide which would be the more uncomfortable, Emerson in a Wellsian hockey game or involved in one of those determined sexual irregularities which Wells so loves to depict, or H. G. in a cloudy mist of transcendentalism sitting with Thoreau, Alcott, and Emerson under the elms of Concord. And yet this incongruous pair must be ranked jointly as perhaps the most effective preachers of perfectibility since the French Revolution.

The idea of the perfectibility of man is not so much a theory as a reaction. It represents the primal growth impulse of the animal set free in man by favoring circumstances and finding, like all man's impulses, a theory in which to express itself. New soil, new ideas, escape from tyranny or privilege or constriction, set the buoyant human spirit dreaming of unlimited possibilities. Plagues, anarchy, disaster are followed by ideas of depravity, atonement, and self-denial. Optimism and pessimism have their roots in geography, history, and biology. The puppy frisks, the bird sings, the caged lion sulks—and there is a human analogy in Shelley, lyric with conceptions of freedom, Dickens, gamboling in sheer richness of living, Byron, sulking in a megalomania of the imagination.

It is not easy to find a rational system in Emerson's optimism, but it is easy enough to see why he was optimistic.

When he was not contemplating his own soul freed from the shackles of Calvinism, he looked westward to boundless opportunity for the individual strong enough to live a self-controlled life. His New England intellect, the product of natural selection working upon a picked race, felt its own self-sufficiency and saw nothing except physical hardship and the wrong will of inferior men to prevent the perfectibility of the Emersonian type. He did not trouble himself much, not so much as Thoreau, with the weaker stocks, the shanty Irish whose descendants a century later were to rule Boston; his hypothesis was the perfection of the selected individual, and if some of us lived Emerson instead of misreading him, we might still justify his hope.

Wells, spiritually his antithesis, intellectually is his brother, half a century removed. Science has sped faster than time in that half century, and Wells, born from the serving classes, glimpsed its possibilities for the remedying of a social state that had pinched him cruelly. Emerson assumes a world more or less like Concord, with a living easily earned, and opportunity for ministers, philosophers, or pencil makers equally to exercise their will to be perfect men. Unfortunately, Concord was on its way to be a suburb of Boston instead of an outpost of Utopia, but that was a hazard which waits upon all philosophers. Wells, two generations later, must start further behind. He has the inequitable conditions of modern and specifically European men to wrestle with, first privilege and then the injustices and stupidities of industrialism. He sees that England must be turned upside down before a cockney can live in Concordian equality with his more privileged neighbors. But there is science to make wealth accessible to all, journalism to spread reforming doctrines, history to prove that states which keep down their H. G. Wellses



always collapse, ordinary logic to show that a little clear thinking can make marriage function, wars cease, children be better bred, and mankind far happier and more hopeful than even in Concord. And so, for different reasons, and with different means in view, he, too, becomes a perfectibilitarian. Emerson would have read and understood "The War of the Worlds," "Tono Bungay," and "The Outline of History" far better than many contemporary critics. He would have seen instantly, and approved, the consistency of the philosophy that runs through them all. Whether he would have agreed with the Wellsian technique of reform or welcomed the Wellsian ideal man, is another question.

I am not trying to demonstrate similarity between the sage of Concord and the voice of London; all I wish is to show that like athletes with very different techniques they have played on the same side of the great game between man and nature. They are both optimists, both believers that the curve of change is upward, not downward. But when this has been stated, the difference between them becomes more significant than the resemblance. I find the best clew to this difference in the preface to the forthcoming edition of the Works of H. G. Wells. He has had time to write, and now he has an opportunity to survey all that he has written, and here is his conclusion, for which I beg a most careful reading:

He wished, he says, "to satisfy an overpowering need to know—to know personally, to get hold of the hang of life as one saw it, with that clearness, that sense of achieved possession, which, he found, only writing down could give. . . . Certain ideas appear very early and develop. There is, for example, a profound skepticism about man's knowledge of final reality. . . . This line of thought leads to the recognition that such ideas as the idea of



Right and the idea of God may also prove to be relative and provisional, that they are attempts to simplify and so bring into the compass of human reactions what is otherwise humanly inexpressible. . . . Another idea is the idea of a synthetic Collective Mind, arising out of and using and passing on beyond our individual minds. . . . It is the writer's belief that human society is now undergoing changes more rapid and more profound than have ever happened to it before. . . . Himself a child of change, . . . escaping only by very desperate exertions from a life of servitude and frustration, . . . he is still enormously aware of and eager to understand and express, the process of adaptation, destruction, and reconstruction . . . that is going on all about us. . . . Even in his novels his characters . . . are attempting desperately to understand, and still more desperately to thrust at and interfere with change. . . . The writer confesses his profound disbelief in any permanent or perfect work of art. All art, all science, and still more certainly all writing are experiments in statement. There will come a time for every work of art when it will have served its purpose and be bereft of its last rag of significance. . . . This edition is a diary of imaginations and ideas. . . . To the questions, 'Do you believe in God?' 'Do you believe in nationality?' 'Do you believe in individualism, in socialism?' the writer shows himself as often disposed to answer 'yes' as 'no.' One cannot give precise answers to indefinable questions. . . . You will find the writer . . . telling of just the sort of God . . . he believes in, and just the sort that he repudiates and denies. Yet . . . he is . . . surprised at his own general consistency."

Answering indefinable questions was, of course, Emerson's specialty, and whether he ever gave thought to his ultimate consistency is questionable. It certainly would not

have surprised him to discover it! And here is a vital difference. Wells is sure of nothing ultimate, all is experiment; but of the validity of experiment he is certain, and therefore of the possibility of a certain and fortunate result. Emerson's essays, one must believe, were felt as an end in themselves. They were ideals in the Platonic sense—beautiful things accomplished toward which men might, and he believed would, approach. But the novels and tales and essays of Wells are all means to an end, experimental, indurable, to be "bereft of the last rag of significance" when the validity or invalidity of their ideas should pass into human experiment. The poison gas and airplanes of "The War of the Worlds" and "The Sleeper Awakes" are mere literary curiosities already—so will it be with his character studies, his social ideas, his plots, and his style. This theory of literature accounts for much in Mr. Wells and in a generation which may be called Wellsian as justly as Shavian.

For leaving aside the philosophical aspects of this relative view of life, it is clear that when it comes to contemporary criticism which, as he says, is often vitiated by an aloofness to the personal equation, the Wellsian theory of art is bound to have immediate effects on the writer. This theory holds that all writing is journalism, whose business it is to report as accurately as may be what seems to be happening, with full consciousness that the thing is an experiment. It is the theory of the editorial, the special article, the propaganda novel, and other *genres* familiar in contemporary writing. But with this difference. Mr. Wells feels good journalism to be of the highest importance; it possesses "that clearness, that sense of achieved possession, which only writing down can give." Here is a new defense of modernism, in a theory of writing which attempts to justify the very impermanence and topicality which

wiseacres have cursed in our literature; and a new standard of criticism by which the age can be convicted of failure to achieve its own ideals.

But let us stick to Mr. Wells. How much better one understands both his defects and his virtues after this honest and penetrating statement. It is a commonplace to say that he has no style in the literary sense, although all acknowledge a fluency amounting to grace, and a flexibility of prose capable of adaptation to mathematical theory or the involutions of the human spirit. He has no style because style has for its chief attribute that beauty which comes from final expression, and Mr. Wells has seldom desired final expression. He has thought rapidly and written rapidly, catching this day's appearance of truth with perfect knowledge that tomorrow's may be different and must be caught again. He is consistent as a daily paper is consistent, approximating in a year what one group of men think significant in life, but reissued each day with different views of the universe. *Paradise Losts* are not written this way, nor *King Lear*s—and it is notorious that Mr. Wells does not highly estimate the authors of these two attempts to fix the truth. He estimates no poet highly; and in himself has only so much poetry as must inhere in a powerful intellect esthetically sensitive when not otherwise concerned.

Indeed it might be fair to ask whether Mr. Wells believes in journalism as the highest good because he is not a poet; or whether he is not a poet because his whole being is absorbed in journalism. A poet must have faith in absolutes; he cannot make beauty if he believes it to be fleeting, whatever he may say in his poem. His poem he must believe in, whatever he thinks in philosophy. And for a man of great literary power to subscribe to the utilitarian view of literature—that it serves the ideas it em-

bodies and then, like a rag, disintegrates—is, if he speaks from his heart, to be just such a writer as Mr. Wells—effective, fluent, unpolished, sometimes slipshod, and though often excellent, never beautiful, nor in the best sense fine. His opposite, Anatole France, who did not believe in the perfectibility of man, but was sure of the perfectibility of style, is infinitely his superior as a stylist—though quite possibly inferior in immediate serviceability to man.

And this is why the Works of Mr. Wells prove to be of surprisingly high level of excellence, exceeding in interest, in competence, and in their cumulative effect of social ideas worked out from every angle, the writing of perhaps any other contemporary, with the possible exception of Shaw, and yet yielding no single great book. The best are all like his history—interesting, significant, influential, and yet clearly experiments to be discarded when the life has been sucked from them. That other experimentalist, Shaw, has beaten him here. But then Shaw is an Irishman. He has been less consistent than Wells, and therefore, in a literary sense, more successful, for in despite of cynicism he has sought the final phrase to express change in humanity.

Thus if we are to assess Mr. Wells we must take him on his own basis of valuation. It is useless to pick out single stories of high merit—"The Invisible Man," for example, with its admirable narrative, "The War of the Worlds," with its wonderfully controlled fancy, or "Marriage," which is certainly one of the best idea-stories of the century. You cannot make a silk purse masterpiece for all times from any one of these. Wells did not wish it, and he has not made it. Nor is it useful to make the hackneyed distinction between his earlier romances of science and his later social philosophies, saying as one

used to say of Henry James, that his earlier manner would have led to greatness. This is nonsense. His earlier manner led where it was inevitably pointed, to his later manner. Substantially all his social ideas are implicit in his first fantastic stories, and it is not necessary to read the Fabian essays contemporary with them, as published in Volume IV of the new edition, for a careful reader to see in "The Time Machine," "Dr. Moreau's Island," and "The War of the Worlds" all the hopes and fears of humanity which later come out from romance into realism with no more than a natural increase in scope and explicitness. Wells was a skilled writer from the first; he remained a journalist to the last; literature—if by literature we mean a final expression of anything, even change—was not in his purview. He did not want it.

He must be assessed as journalism is assessed, for its skill as such, for its effectiveness, for its influence. And the success of Wells, so regarded, is amazing. He has had dull books, mistaken books, like "God, the Invisible King," where he strayed into metaphysics and was lost, trivial books—but an astonishing pressure of ideas is constant throughout his works from first to last, with a momentum that carries on to really triumphant conclusions. With never a single masterpiece, he has "got over" his ideas, as the current slang has it, and done as much as any individual, and more than all but a few, to direct the current of popular thinking within the strait limits in which such direction is possible. He is not a great artist, not a great thinker, not a great novelist, not a great satirist. A great writer he certainly is.

But experiment must lead somewhere, and all of Wells's laboratory exhibits of humanity—from his demonstrations of the egoism of nationality, through his proofs of the stupidity of the unscientific, down to his



almost pathetic attempts to establish first, last, and always a policy in which free love can become moral—all are futile if men will not play his game. Indeed, from this point of view, it is questionable which of the two idealists—Wells and Emerson—is the more naïve in his fixed belief that anything can be made of this poor human creature if the handling is right.

Emerson at least understood that the will to be perfect did not necessarily rise from opportunity. He knew more of the moral nature than Wells, having ethics in his blood, and his whole effort may be regarded as an attempt to further the self-development of a good will in man. Unfortunately he was hypothesizing for a peculiar people, in which strong will was common, and a will to be right, as they saw the right, congenital to the point of disease. His ideas degrade themselves when absorbed by inferiors into a sentimental idealism which substitutes the will for the deed. A brood of delusive religions has sprung from his teaching, and an ethical system that denies realities when they are not agreeable. Within the circle of his own kind, his ideas keep their fruitful soundness.

Wells guesses that the will to be perfect will follow the means, and it is to be feared he often guesses wrong. In his negatives he is nearly always right, for he is far closer to observable realities than Emerson, and never in danger of thinking that industrialism can be countered by retiring to the country. Where Emerson preaches, Wells legislates; and if this sorry scheme of things were to be refashioned for the present population, Wells would be the safer engineer. Emerson would be strong on advice, but weak in the transportation systems.

Yet it is to be feared, again, that Wells does not allow enough for human depravity. For all his emancipation,



Emerson, like Hawthorne, had a lively sense of the tendency downward which their ancestors had felt to be the most important fact about the human race. Hawthorne believed that for individuals it was inescapable; Emerson thought that it could be willed out of existence. But Wells is passionately fond of the full-blooded animal, and will not sacrifice any of its instincts, particularly the procreative, in order to make perfectibility theoretically more sure. He is eighteenth century in his fundamental belief that when we once see reason, and can use reason without the let of poverty and the hamper of bad education, the problem will be solved. Or as Tennyson, sentimentalizing a bit in the way of his century, put it (with a different meaning for "highest")—

We needs must love the highest when we see it.

It is easier, in short, to conceive of his social legislation in practice than in Emerson's self-reliance operating in a world of over-souls, but one is skeptical of the final result in either case. The two conceptions are, as Wells says of Newtonian space and syllogistic reasoning, "simplifications of a more subtle and intangible reality."

However that may be, H. G. has woven a broad fabric all of one pattern, though of many colors and occasional misses in the weave, an impressive social contribution, which, once removed from the literary categories and regarded simply as the social function of writing, must entitle him to more consideration than the nose-tilting connoisseurs of the arts have been willing to bestow. We will not compare such a writer with a Shakespeare or a Shelley, for in defiance of Mr. Wells's definition of literature, we do not admit that the two are comparable, and unhesitatingly assert a permanence of beauty, barring the haps of time and chance, which has a value apart from

and probably above any social philosophy whatsoever. But if one must choose for its absolute value in these decades between pure art in the second grade and pure journalism as exemplified in Mr. Wells, one chooses the journalism.

The god of literature is a jealous god and accepts no excuses of social service rendered. In his temple Wells will never be worshipped. Beauty, broadly interpreted, must be an end in itself if beauty is to be served. Any more immediate purpose, such as teaching men how to organize a state, or control their own desires, has a way of rotting like old beams and bringing down the whole edifice. Let us not call Wells by the name he does not desire then, of artist, but preacher-journalist; and who will say that his services are not greater than all the professed estheticists of this particular generation? We are committed in an industrial period either to social amelioration or collapse—one can see that without determining which is the more desirable; that is what many dreamers toying with beauty do not see. And for social amelioration—which, if he is right and man can be perfected by reason, will make beauty possible, Wells has been a prime mover, counting in popular thought perhaps more than far greater philosophers and all the preachers of all the churches combined.

## VII. *Emerson*

EMERSON is the George Washington of American literature. He has been made into a plaster saint, very cold plaster, very highbrow saintliness, and his philosophy has been used to get children up in the morning, warmed over for sentimental religions, and adapted for advertise-

ments of bath tubs and real estate. Hitch your wagon to a star, has been the motto of many an American speculation.

Emerson, self-revealed in his Journals, is by no means the impeccable mentor which his imitators, all the way to Elbert Hubbard and beyond, have pretended to be. He is humorous, he is vain, a man naïvely longing for company worthy of his own intellect and desiring to shine therein; he struts when he sets down a self-conscious epigram, with an air of looking it over; he is querulous and craves sympathy, he is afraid he will die before he becomes famous, he is often inconsistent. Only a man both great and very human could work out the theories of pacifism and non-resistance which less original men have been rediscovering ever since, and yet, most amazingly, in the heat of the Civil War decide that only fighting settles such controversies, and accuse Grant at the end of too great generosity in the terms of peace. He was human in other senses also. Wealth, he wrote, loses much of its value if it have not wine. "I abstain from wine only because of the expense."

Surely this is no theorist, but a true child of Adam. But he is more than mere man. With Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton he comes near to representing the total formative idea of young America. The belittlers will have difficulty with this journal of a transparently great soul which reads like a Bible of American idealism. There is the intense ambition for self-betterment in it, the boundless hope of success, the self-reliance of the pioneer, the half mystic withdrawals toward nature and the woods which so many Americans have experienced, the humorous self-criticism—"great race, but though an admirable fruit, you shall not find one good, sound, well-developed apple in the tree. Nature herself was in a hurry with these

hasters and never finished one." Even that curious mixture of puritanism with its opposite which is so typically American that every critic of puritanism from Cooper and Whitman down to Mencken becomes half puritan himself, is in Emerson. He praises Shakespeare because his characters are done in sport and left with God, and in another breath accuses Boccaccio of giving all his attention to a sex excitement which is intense only at rare intervals, and can be appreciated, in any case, only by the continent. He is titillated by a ballet dancer in Boston, but decides that while she may be bad for the boys from Harvard, a good student of the world like himself should see, hear, and presumably experience, everything that is the best of its kind. And yet he believes (with the Prohibitionists) that a sect for the suppression of intemperance or of loose behavior to women would be more useful than either Orthodoxy or Unitarianism which only attack each other, for the governing of our passions with absolute sway is the chief work we have to do.

"Goethe was the cow from which all their milk was drawn," Emerson says of the nineteenth century. Emerson was the cow from which came the milk of the American idealists, philanthropists, boosters, reformers—yes, and statesmen, preachers, editors who have been on the side of the angels in this country ever since. Indeed the most that they have done is to thin or sour it. No one can possibly understand this country, either what it was, what it has become, or what it may be, or comprehend its unexpected moral strength or its (to Americans) equally unexpected moral weakness, unless he knows his Emerson. And if Emerson can be finally studied only in his essays and his poetry, he is read at his most spontaneous, most sincere, and most American in these diaries, which were after all exercises in the discipline of setting down

clearly what he felt and thought. If you are an American by birth or training, and an idealist by disposition, it is questionable whether you know yourself until you have read Emerson!

### VIII. *Mark Twain*

WHEN Mark Twain was alive his friends would not take him seriously; willy-nilly, for them, he was a buffoon to the end. Now that he is dead and his autobiography has been published, his admirers take him too seriously. For them, he is the great protestant who never spoke out because his wife would not let him; he was the radical born before his time who kept on his conservative shirt when he ought to have gone berserker into the contest against corrupt corporations, militarists, millionaires, and the false gods of a degenerating America. He is the Lost Leader.

We are always scolding our dead heroes because they do not fight our battles. Shakespeare is much too complaisant to royalty, Lincoln was willing to keep slavery if he could save the Union, Wilson made political appointments. It shocks us to discover that Washington did not believe in universal suffrage, or that Mark Twain admired the Standard Oil Corporation and loved capitalists.

Mark Twain was a radical nevertheless. At least half of the really important writers in American literature have been radical, politically or socially or both. His attack upon vested injustice, intolerance, and obscurantism in "A Yankee in King Arthur's Court" and "The Prince and the Pauper" is quite as indignant as Samuel Butler's in "The Way of All Flesh." Critics forget the social courage of his anti-imperialism and the commercial courage of his on-

slaught upon Christian Science. Yet they say he did not "speak out," he never lashed the smugness of American bourgeois life, never complained of hypocrisy in a society for which anecdote had to be censored before it could be put in a lecture or in print. He forgave too much in America.

It is true that Mark Twain was a humanitarian and not a reformer. He was like his mother who could catch the whip hand of a brutal teamster, but accept slavery because she never saw it abused. Nevertheless, the important distinction between Mark Twain and our contemporaries who believe that his genius for satire should have been used for their pet causes, is not this one. They were born angry, but Mark Twain grew angry only well on in life. This slow-gathering moral indignation has one advantage, for as it grows it gathers to itself memories that have become vivid with time, and the pictures it paints of wrong and injustice have a depth which no sudden wrath can provide. The final condemnation of slavery is not in the abolitionist "Uncle Tom's Cabin" but in the experiences of that convinced Southerner, "Huckleberry Finn."

And such a slow-moving temper has what some may consider a disadvantage also, a disadvantage which is apparent in the mellow ramblings of the "Autobiography." Twain could hate rascals, hypocrites, and most of all pompous fools, but he found it increasingly difficult to be angry with individuals, because he knew too many men. He had been a public character himself from an early age, with the voluminous acquaintance of a public character, plus the shrewdness of a congenital observer. He was well aware that a doubtful course may be conducted by a lovable man, and like all humanitarians, when he found the leader honest he grew more tolerant



of his activities. A convinced radical should be no respecter of persons, which means that he should never like his opponents, and so must often fail to comprehend their principles. For Twain, to whom H. H. Rogers was the ideal gentleman, a trust could not be a monster of wickedness. His infinite admiration for Grant tempered his distaste for the scandals of the Grant régime. If he had known, and liked, Mrs. Eddy, he might have been gentler with Christian Science. Not that Twain's liking was readily gained. The "Autobiography" shows that it was easier to win his pocketbook than his heart.

Mark Twain knew much more of America than his more scornful successors. Perhaps that is why he liked his country in spite of the deeds of his countrymen. And he knew and liked too many successful men to believe that they were all oppressors and crooks. He spoke out fearlessly when he was moved, but he was moved by his own grievances, not ours, and his hatred for things as they were was constantly tempered by his friendship for men as they are. What he lost in vehemence he made up in wisdom.

### IX. *Walt Whitman*

WALT WHITMAN has a fitting monument but he is not yet to go into the Hall of Fame. For that he must wait until the hot blood of his poetry has been cooled by time to a decorous temperature. (Indeed the most distinguished literary club in America has not yet put "Leaves of Grass" in its otherwise distinguished library<sup>1</sup>). And perhaps by then some literary reputations that will have cooled too far will be cast out to make room for him.

Walt Whitman deserves a monument in which his

<sup>1</sup> Or had not in 1926. The reference is to The Century Association.

speaking likeness will live again, for the man was capacious even without his books. Not great as he ever supposed himself to be, not great as the prototype of a new race of Western men in which democracy should release energy, love, and exaltation until the people should taste every experience, touch every hope, with no inhibitions and complete self-expansion—a race of personalities, nobly bodied, richly souled. No, Walt Whitman was the last of his race, not the first. After him came the love of the body that he sought, women who were—

Tann'd in the face by shining suns and blowing winds,  
Their flesh has the old divine suppleness and strength,  
They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike,  
retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves,  
They are ultimate in their own right—they are calm, clear,  
well-possess'd of themselves,

and city men as vigorous as the country boys in the armies he saw marching southward in the 'sixties. But after him, too, came the contraction of American life, the standardization of the American type, the spread of the cheap magazine, the triumph of the bourgeois spirit, until ninety per cent of white Americans were as indistinguishable in manners, dress, ideas, and ambitions as the helots of Sparta or the Russian Jews. The exuberant personality which he thought was to be set free in the West was crushed by numbers; the open road was overrun by automobiles; there was no time to loaf; how could you love your democratic brother when after the 'seventies he was likely to speak only Italian or Yiddish! In fact, most that Whitman prophesied, and pretty much all that he stood for, has failed to come to pass.

All the more does he deserve this monument. Like Lincoln, he showed what democracy could do, and therefore

can do again. The thousands who have quoted his poetry, the hundreds of thousands who have read some part of it, are not always, or often, moved by its literary qualities. Walt's great lines surge up from tiresome repetition, his finest poems are marred somewhere by the sudden banality of a man of little taste, his free rhythms are often lazy and unruly servants. It takes a lover of poetry to admire his greatness; the literary critic who understands sense and skill, but is deaf to poetry, finds every good reason to attack his crudity. The everyday reader is constantly puzzled by turgid mysticism and offended by coarseness. Yet every sensitive spirit responds somewhere to that personality of Whitman which he endeavored to describe in everything he wrote. Fulness of living, grasping of opportunity, sympathy with man as man, the response to the booming chords of a continent open to all, the dynamic lift of energy in the breast of one who says "I can do that. I can be that," were caught at the very moment of hope by Walt Whitman. And what he was, what might have been, may be again.

Emerson, the fount of that optimistic idealism which believed that a new type of man would be made in America, had two great disciples in Thoreau and Whitman. Thoreau, inspired by Emerson, sought his soul in the wilderness; Whitman became Emerson's man (as far as he could be any one's) and tried to inaugurate a universal brotherhood. Thoreau's monument is Walden Pond; but Whitman's must preserve the ample form, the warm eye, the paternal beard, the very person of the prophet himself. For he was what he preached.

x. *Thoreau*

SELECTING from seven thousand pages of the Journals of Henry Thoreau "the paragraphs and sentences in which Thoreau was most triumphantly himself," Professor Odell Shepard has hoped to bring to full fame and influence a great American writer. He has planned to popularize Thoreau. It is hopeless. Thoreau will never be popularized. Consecrated to simplicity of living and a love of simple men, indifferent to ease, hostile to wealth, Thoreau is nevertheless the most invincibly aristocratic of writers. He makes no concessions to humor (and that is his fault), administers no pap, asks for no man's applause, will not even call in the smooth devices of rhetoric to his aid. He is the exact and complete antithesis of the feature writer of the modern press. There must be a little of Thoreau in every ardent reader of Thoreau—some stubbornness of the mind that refuses to accept current values, some flux of the body toward nature which makes living more intense in the presence of the woods, the fields, the winds, some questions (as we used to say in more naïve days) ready to ask of the universe. To expect popularity for Thoreau is to expect it for the hermit thrush, for philosophy, for wild apples, for tramping the countryside at dawn. But respect, enthusiasm, even reverence—that is another story.

And "The Heart of Thoreau's Journals" will help to give this full-flavored American his due of reading, and his proper rating which, curiously, foreigners have been more willing to accord him than we ourselves. Pan, one might say in the words of earlier critics of Thoreau, may have his altar raised again.

But Pan is a false comparison. Thoreau, if there must

be a classic analogy, is not the Pan but the Socrates of New England, as Emerson was its Delphic Oracle. The Concord pencil maker and the Athenian philosopher were fellow toilers in spirit if not in temperament. One questioned nature and the other man, but what makes a good life was the common purpose of their inquiries. I advance no foolish comparison of merit and influence. Indeed, as I shall point out later, there were fatal limitations set about Thoreau that make his work all the more interesting but his achievements less. He can claim no general influence upon a nation which still feeds its idealism upon the milk and water it made of Emerson's doctrines, but ran away from all that Thoreau believed in as fast as it ran from Whitman's democracy, as fast as Greece ran from Euripides, Rome from Vergil, England from Shakespeare's fulness of life.

Yet this cannot change our sober estimate that Thoreau is a mind to be reckoned with in every readjustment of human values. He is seminal. He is an authority in struggles of the spirit, a thinker and a personality who will always have disciples. Alcott said that he went to Emerson for his wine and to Thoreau for his venison. That is exactly right. The man made nourishment of locusts and wild honey. I can imagine no Parnassus on which this stocky American in his frayed corduroys will not somewhere be straying, seeing much, saying little, meditating upon asphodel, anemone, the mountain tops, friends, and the fruitfulness of life.

I do not refer to Thoreau's power over nature lovers. It is true that the man had a brain in each of his five senses. In a few sentences of description—the painted tortoise, grackles, the woodchuck, the canoe birch, the waters of Walden—he can transmit that thrill of escape into the larger rhythms of nature which, ever since the romantic

movement began, has been food and drink to those sensitive to earth. Compare him with his disciple, Burroughs, an observer better informed, more accurate than Thoreau, and note how the imagination in Burroughs's essays is all borrowed from Thoreau and diluted. Subtract Thoreau from Burroughs and you get such quaint and interesting observations as Audubon made, no more. Set Thoreau by the nature sentimentalizing of our day and it is like placing Milton by Marie Corelli. The language is the same, and often the subject matter, everything else different.

Indeed Mr. Shepard is right in his Preface when he says that Thoreau was not a scientific naturalist, did not intend to be, and that he submerged his poetic faculty by an increasing tendency to observe and record as he grew older. But he is wrong in thinking that the cause was a change in purpose. The most popular, because the easiest, parts of Thoreau's works are his records of nature. They are the classic instances in English (with some of Hudson's) of a nice balance between sight and interpretation, nicely expressed in flawless prose. But Thoreau the nature man is only Thoreau in passing, Thoreau, so to speak, in the Preface, and it is the more he wished to get from nature and never finally extracted entire which gives these observations the touch of genius—as of something ungraspable because it is behind the veil—which makes them more than they seem and therefore what they are, not merely good description, but literature. You cannot generalize Thoreau in such a slogan as Back to Nature. He would have been the first to repudiate such a phrase, the first to be thankful that Boy Scouts and Nature Hikers do not use, or understand, him.

Nor can you generalize him as the incarnation of a contemplative life, and set that down as his chief study. His



social philosophy is not negative, it is positive. "Walden" is no argument for withdrawal from active life, it is a document in values. Thoreau went to Walden Pond because he wanted to think certain thoughts, enjoy certain advantages, do certain things, which were hampered in a community where one had to live like one's neighbors. The escape to Walden was a triumphant protest against industrialism which says produce for the complex needs of civilization and you shall share some of the complexities. But what if I do not want varied food, extravagant clothes, excessive transportation, nervous excitement? You must want them, says industrialism, or you will not produce. Right, replies Thoreau, then I will cut the dilemma by reducing my material wants, and thus provide easily for my intellectual and esthetic being. My solution is Walden; what is yours?

And so it was not toward Walden that he would lead mankind at large, but away from false values in living. If he took what seems to the city dweller the desperate step of going back to nature, it was because he realized that compromise would never save modern man from his machinery and so chose what was the way of no compromise for him, as a hunger strike or a revolution might have been for another. The early British Labor Movement, so I am informed by Mr. H. M. Tomlinson who took part in it, was nourished upon "Walden." The voters of the labor party, who were as urban, if not as cockney, as socialism, carried "Walden" in their pockets and knew it by heart. They were less far-seeing than Thoreau. New values in living were what they sought, as he did, but they could not escape from their machines. Better hours, higher wages, were all they asked for finally, and all they got.

Thus Thoreau's ideal was not a repetition of the monk's way, although it had many analogies. He desired, not es-

cape from physical and intellectual life, but opportunity to get what he wanted. These Journals make clear that it was not men, not civilization, but what we now understand by industrialism, that he flouted.

There is no understanding Thoreau until you forget for a moment the frayed corduroys, the unsociable habits, the eccentricity of one who loved to wade neck deep in the swamps to surprise nature in her secrets, and realize that here was a man who, far from advocating some Oriental mysticism or emotional escape, was engaged upon the central problem of modern life—how to live a good life in an increasingly mechanical world. Of course, like all the Concord wise men, he was a little exalted, inclined to the esoteric, obsessed in his youth with conventional moral problems, which he soon got over. Even at twenty-four the moral element in his compositions offended him: "Strictly speaking, morality is unhealthy. Those undeserved joys which come uncalled . . . are they that sing." He got drunk, too, now and then on Emerson's orphic wine. Yet more simply and with less rhetoric than Carlyle, more sensibly and with less dependence upon the hypothetical pure soul in common men than Emerson, and far more directly than Ruskin, Thoreau met the problems that science and its industrialism has raised, and did not forget science in giving his answer.

Emerson, the pure-souled, orphic Emerson, Emerson as worthy to be sainted as any of the fathers of the church, began it. From his first "Nature" onward, Emerson, bard and prophet though he was, steadily concerned himself with science. Eliminate the new scientific view of the universe from Emerson and he becomes a high-souled mystic, eloquent but depersonalized. It was the new geology, the new biology, the new chemistry which attached his radiant mind to earthly speculations. Without them he

would have soared, like Alcott, into what seems to us vacuity, or been an eloquent voice chanting mysteries in the empyrean. We forget the science in Emerson because we know more of it than he did; we do not remember that his prime effort was to deduce from material facts a soul that would carry evolution beyond the terms of science.

Thoreau<sup>1</sup> was also a child of the scientific age, and in this respect a foster child of Emerson. He was not, as has been so often said, Emerson's ideal man in actual experience. On the contrary, Waldo, who on the slightest provocation, rose into the blue, disapproved of Thoreau's obstinate clinging to trivial fact. His idea was to state the dilemma, and then to transcend it, solving by poetry what logic and realism could not untangle. He looked a millennium ahead and may be right for the millennium; but Thoreau was content with a century. There are new thoughts in Emerson that are eternally true, but Thoreau was not only true but timely. He fits at the moment, today. Absorb Emerson as American idealists absorb him, and he is emasculated in the process; but Thoreau has not yet been assimilated and probably never will be. You cannot follow Thoreau and yet be the docile citizen adjusting ideals to circumstances. This does not make him a greater man than Emerson, but it does make inexplicable our neglect of his genius—a fault this new book may help to remedy.

Both men, and this has not been sufficiently recognized, had to generalize from sources which were not yet adequate. Both rested upon a science imperfect in nearly every department. In every one of Emerson's lectures and essays there is a point at which the science provided by Harvard College failed him, either because it had not gone

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed, at greater length and with fuller application, the economic and social values of Thoreau's work and the scientific implications of Emerson, in chapters on these men in a book to be published later.

far enough, or gone too far along paths which his metaphysics could readily criticize. At that point the scholar turned prophet, the teacher orator, the careful thinker a glowing optimist. The real power of Emerson resides in these flaming terminals of his patient thought, but we must too often say, not proven. Nature may be the other half of soul, but now that nature has been reduced to force, and force begins to approach a definition, we await further news before accepting a new metaphysics that will stretch beyond knowledge.

Thoreau also suffered from the need to generalize upon a science still in its infancy, but he was more cautious, for he knew better than Emerson that there was more to know. He saw that man versus nature was the modern problem in its social as well as in its transcendental sense, and that already the control of nature, which Emerson worded so readily as a dominance of the physical by the spiritual, was quite as likely to tie man to his discoveries as to free him for transcendentalism. Hence his life work, as he said, was his Journal, which is essentially a record of experience. "A man must see before he can say. Statements are made but partially. A fact, truly and absolutely stated, is taken out of the region of commonsense, and acquires a mythological or universal significance. . . . As you *see*, so at length will you *say*. . . . At first blush, a man is not capable of reporting truth. To do that, he must be drenched and saturated with it." Thoreau's observations were imperfect, the facts that he generalized upon were scanty, his deductions partial, and seldom coördinated like Emerson's, but they were sound. He kept a balance between science and poetry, as modern philosophers do not, hitched his wagon to planets not stars, aimed short of Emerson, achieved less, but, I think, hit closer to the mark of the problem of the twentieth century.

In the light of these conclusions it may be possible to discuss more accurately Thoreau's excellences and shortcomings, to answer Mr. Shepard's objection that his obsession with science dragged him down, to explain why there is so much wisdom in Thoreau, and yet so little finished thinking, so much left to be dug out by the like-minded, so much literature and so few masterpieces of literary form.

Thoreau was a New Englander. That was his strength, but also his weakness. "The glorious sandy banks far and near, caving and sliding—far sandy slopes, the forts of the land, where you see the naked flesh of New England, her garment being blown aside like that of the priests when they ascend to the altar. Seen through this November sky, these sands are dear to me, worth all the gold of California, suggesting Pactolus. . . . Dear to me to lie in, this sand; fit to preserve the bones of a race for thousands of years to come. And this is my home, my native soil; and I am a New Englander." It was seldom that he allowed himself such eloquence.

Concord 1840-1860 was as civilized a spot as the world could show, if high thinking makes civilization, but it was not normal, not typical of the new industrial civilization. Thoreau, with his love of music, had to be content with the singing of the telegraph wires, and if the adjacent Harvard library and Boston book shops were well provided, yet personal contacts with minds not bred in Concord were rare—a limitation for a philosopher intent upon the conditions of the good life not lightly to be overlooked. And the backdoor of New England was always open. Escape to nature was too easy.

When he wished to evade the conventionalities of an education designed for theologians, and a community life organized for production and trade, his ready resource,



like many another American's, was the wilderness, which lay across Spalding's lot only a field or two away. Emerson went there to commune with the spirit of the universe, but Thoreau to study. Nature was his science. He had no laboratory, no instruments, no data of sociology, no training therein, no means of using his senses, upon whose sharpening he based his hopes of progress, except in his own New England woods. New England was his laboratory, and because he was a youth who inhabited his body "with inexpressible satisfaction," and because his senses, as so commonly with Americans, enriched themselves not with towns which were poor, or gardens which were ragged, but in the woods, in wild nature, easy of access, liberalizing, free to all, the natural history of New England became the happy testing ground where he could study facts and deduce from them. He was content with nature.

But nature thus approached yields more art than science. The laborious repetitions in the complete Journals, birds, flowers, insects noted again and again in order of the seasons, which Mr. Shepard believes to be a sign of growing weakness in the man, are his struggles to know more with an imperfect instrument and a too limited field. He had enough for descriptions that tremble with the inner reality, he had enough to begin his philosophy, but he needed more science than rural New England could give him, a broader, deeper, more accurate science, in order to go on. Because he was self-dependent, had to be self-dependent in these matters, he wasted time on observations that led nowhere.

It was well enough to shut the outer eye in an Emersonian rapture and soar upon intuitions, but Thoreau wanted more facts, and if these Journals, read one way, are the record of metaphysical perceptions, read another



they are as much an inquiry into the facts of nature as Darwin's "Voyage of the Beagle"—a different inquiry of course for Thoreau was untrained and his purpose was to discover not so much the nature of life, as how to live, yet an instructive parallel. The author of "Civil Disobedience" and of the social philosophy of "Walden" wished to know the rules, the conditions, the aims of living. But his tastes and circumstances held him back from the world of men, and the microscope and the scrutiny of birds and flowers narrowed his field to "details, not wholes nor the shadow of the whole" even of his beloved nature. The result of his ardent observing was at the most that he could "count some parts, and say, 'I know.'"

Nevertheless, Thoreau, if not the first philosopher to realize that in an age of scientific industrialism man must be interpreted in the light of science, was the first to accept the conditions of hard, plodding labor in observation which that implies. He was determined to work out a true relation between philosophy and a good and possible life. And if he had to go to Walden and the woods in order to find one, at least it was a life he got and not merely an escape. And if he solved only one equation of many, at least no urban thinker will be able to tell us how to live a good life without knowing men in industrialism as well as Thoreau knew pine trees, lakes, and birds.

And no first-rate mind has tackled Thoreau's problem since he left it. The first-rate minds have been busy with science as an end in itself. They have pushed on so fast that the philosophers have lost pace with them. Only journalists, like H. G. Wells, sweep up the new facts of a year and make a brilliant synthesis of living, good until new observations arrive. Perhaps they are right to get on with their investigations, but one begins to long for a scientific holiday, as some English bishop has recently said,

and a Thoreau to turn researches, still barren beyond the plane of comfort, into principles good for a good life. For if Thoreau were young again today, he would still have to begin by going back to Walden.

Science has always bored the literary man, which is one reason why men of letters are less influential now than in any other civilized century. The critics feel that Thoreau's obsession with nature as science was a weakness in his literary career. This floundering and bogging on the outer edges of great discoveries which were never quite discovered, is what keeps readers from his Journals, and reputation from his few good books. Had he thrown his notebooks into Walden Pond, and cleared his mind of chipmunks, canoe birches, sphagnum moss, snowbirds, and Indians; or rather, had he used them all as modern nature writers do, and made short stories of his eternal nature, what charming books he would have written in his later years, for the man had a genius for expression, and a prose style as good as the century produced.

It is true that we lost another Burroughs in Thoreau, and that the call of the wild would have sounded louder and earlier if Thoreau had been just a romanticist instead of a romantic philosopher. But the man was bigger than that. The nature writing of twenty-five years ago is already tame. It will scarcely draw a man out of his backyard, while Thoreau's books are still disturbing. They are books that have not yet reached their level and disposed of their potency. They are like the New Testament, the stories of Voltaire, the Notebooks of Samuel Butler.

And like all by-products of a strong and controlled imagination, like the soliloquies in Shakespeare, and Bernard Shaw's Prefaces, and Wordsworth's lyrical bursts, the essays and fragments on Nature with a capital N in Thoreau, are priceless. When he feels "blessed" and loves

his life in a clear, warm November, when he sees Monadnock over winter hilltops, when he watches the venerable nighthawk upon her nest, plucks wild apples, is enamored of a scrub oak, or walks fluvially through the cool reaches of the Musketaquid, then his written words, as he himself desired, make a tent of sound in which the imagination dwells in a reality beautiful because of its depths of truth. Reading him, many are led to the country who need not guess where his steps would ultimately lead them. Perhaps only a mind bent upon solving the whole duty of man could make such golden profits of his unsucccess.

For of course Thoreau failed in his main purpose, which was to erect a philosophy, not to become a man of letters. He never became a good scientist, not even a good naturalist. He was constantly thwarted by the weakness of his method, which piled up observations that duplicated and seldom cohered. He was misled by the romantic obsessions of his age with the wild and counted upon learning too much from nature's simple plan. And as he grew older, and the difficulty of fitting all that he knew and guessed into some luminous synthesis became greater and greater, he spent more and more of his energies on merely looking and noting. It was a means of safety for an introspective mind that would not indulge in dreaming. This is the reason for the untidiness of his published works. Only a few straight trails blazed their way through to daylight—civil disobedience and what it should consist of, the simple life and how to attain it, mass desires and how to escape them, love of the woods.

He saw that the conquest of nature which would free man from oppression within and without depended upon more poetry than the scientists possessed and more science than either he or Emerson could muster. But he did not

escape the barrenness with which he charged science and the impotence of which he accused poetry.

No one, to be sure, has succeeded where he did not succeed, and no one will until an equal mind, with an equal devotion, shall work out under better auspices the relationship of the novelties of science to the destinies of man. He left ideas, not a system, paragraphs rather than essays, a need of reading with an eager interest, not the irresistible persuasion of sure and completed literary art. Thoreau cannot readily be taught, does not fit in reading lists except by passages wrenched from their context; he can never be popular. And yet he is an American gift to civilization, like maize or tobacco. There are seeds in him still ungerminated. He will be still growing in many an intellect when New England is once again a deer forest beyond its towns, and automobiles, radio, and the other toys of industrialism no longer delude us with the sensation of a full and perfect life. Our backdoors will not then open like those of Concord on the fields and we shall have to seek other escapes than nature from the problems of the mechanical life. But if we do not go back to the woods, we are likely to go back more and more to Thoreau, who will be justified in the next age if not in this one. He is an eccentric with a center in the future as well as in the past.

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## REFLECTIONS, NONE TOO CHEERFUL

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### 1. *The Great Theme*

THERE is only one theme with blood and life in it for literature in our century. Plots that grow from it are vigorous and fecund, fruiting in stories that arouse attention and change the mind. Poetry inspired by it does more than please, it stirs: poetry unaware of it is likely to be jingle or an intellectual trick.

Many varieties of human experience relate themselves to this one theme, religion, love, and conduct most of all, but also happiness, humor, ambition, and peace. Whatever does not touch it somewhere is as unreal as eighteenth century pastorals or twentieth century theology. The drama may seem to play itself out over issues far removed, but if it is vital this is an illusion; they are aspects of the great theme.

The theme is so simple that it must be stated in half a dozen different ways in order to describe it. Simple things are always the most difficult to define. Reduced to lowest terms, it is the effect of machinery on man. Expanded a little, this includes every subtle influence of the age of applied science. It implies those changes in the means of subsistence and the spread of education which have made feminism possible. It includes the atrophy of the hand as

a maker and as a molder of material. It involves the wide substitution of reading for feeling. It is concerned with the nervous unrest of modern woman, pulled two ways by instinct and opportunity. It deals with the shallow strenuousness of modern man, who is easily dissatisfied because he has escaped discomfort without creating happiness. It is the especial phase for our time of the eternal struggle between high and low mindedness, but infinitely complicated since the best things in our civilization—printing, sanitation, free education, and the decline of fear—are dependent upon the same mechanization that produces the chattering salesman whose sum total of activity consists in creating artificial wants where natural desires have been numbed by standardization and convention.

For fifty years at least this has been a theme of lyric poetry, but the minor poets who summoned their readers into the country, or to sea, or into the land of the soul, were thin and poor because they did not realize that the problem had changed since Theocritus. They rebelled, but against what they did not precisely know. Housman, Hardy, Masfield, Frost—these men were different; instead of calling upon the sunset and the evening star, they went back to earth again for strength and spoke from new depths of living.

D. H. Lawrence, of all novelists in our time, has been most aware of the great theme, although many others have been close to it in English, and in French certainly Romain Rolland and Marcel Proust. The very weaknesses of Lawrence have made him, like a sensitive child, vibrate with the wind of change. His febrile passions, his excessive registration of sex, his sense, only equaled, if equaled, by Hardy's, of the powerful relationships between man and his environment, his violent rebellion against the normal and the accepted, these hurt him as a novelist



since at a touch upon any one of them he becomes a prophet, remaking the world according to his own somewhat fantastic desires. Like a Roman voluptuary he would sacrifice a nation for a night of perfect love, but such devotion qualifies him as an expert not only in love but also in the total emotional life of man and woman which thins or stops only at the peril of mind or life or both. He understands the desiccation of mechanical living and his remedies, if violent, are not irrelevant. In "The Plumed Serpent" he damns the soulless, bloodless culture of America with the convenient ease of a fanatic, yet his rambling, repetitive story glows, where it does glow, with unequaled brilliance, and his morbid analyses of sick love, his hysteria of praise for unspoiled maleness, are stirring because they and Mexico are for him just a means of descanting upon the great theme.

Until we reach and pass the climax of the industrial revolution this will be the only theme for literature that is likely to make great books. It is the one inescapable conflict, it is the single fact that is in all facts, and already (as did Renaissance, or Mohammedanism) the mechanized life, the life by machines, aggressive egoism, intellectual irresponsibility, race through all the civilized world. We are in its shadow. Lawrence sees no remedy but in a new love relationship between man and woman, for either, alone in egoism, racks into nervous failure the moment civilization becomes complete. Samuel Butler would have destroyed the machines. Keyserling would have us learn to pierce the subconsciousness on into our own emotional depths. These are tentatives only. The solution is over the horizon, but the theme is here.

## II. *Run, Sheep, Run!*

**P**ITY. *What moved you at first to betake yourself to a pilgrim's life?*

*"Christian. I was driven out of my Native Countrey, by a dreadful sound that was in my ears, to wit, That unavoidable destruction did attend me, if I abode in that place where I was."*

John Bunyan, albeit unwittingly, has stated the plight of the twentieth century. We are all pilgrims, driven by subway, by motor, by elevator, by train, by steamship, by dreadful sounds and persistent sights, hither and thither, willingly or unwillingly, on a planet whose electronic fever is not more vibrant than the minds of men that time has spawned on its periphery.

The state of man before rapid transit and quick communication may not have been happy but at least it was static. His mind, through some millenniums, had been accustomed to a slow succession of impressions, a few changes of scene daily, a few human contacts oft repeated. Travelers were rare, and they traveled more slowly than we live, and with fewer abrupt transitions. The brain, as time had made it, was a sensitive instrument, with a needle of attention that swung violently at the peril of its owner. We are straining the whole machine until the delicate engine labors and knocks and loses all flexibility, until it races whenever the clutch of circumstance is lifted. There is a nervous vibration under constant stimulus and that is bad for the machine.

The human race is growing sick of itself. That this sickness is feverish, that we demand more changes, more faces, more whirling contacts in city crowds, is only a symptom of the disease. It is good to leave Main Street

now and then to sharpen home-keeping wits, and it is true that frequent association breeds intelligence, yet the whirl of consecutive and diverse impressions in which modern man is daily spun is more than can be endured without morbid reaction. We have multiplied mental contacts until they have become uncountable. The newspaper is a series of pulls and strains and shocks upon the intelligence. The body sits, but the mind shoots across space and feels the impact of a hundred blows upon attention. The telephone, psychologically considered, is a device for living always in a crowd. Our progenitors called the rhythm of motion on a horse or coach or ship exciting, and it *is* exciting. But we move all day in ever increasing ratios, and speed by night. A romance recalled to old-time readers the vividness of possible life, but our crowds rush to the movies to see the vividness of life itself, present and to be shared. Books once were leisurely, with context and a padding of comfortable words. We cannot read the old, slow-paced books. Children must have Scott, Cooper, Dickens condensed for them or excerpted. A typical modern story is stripped bare to pungent dialogue in which the quick-minded get change and stress without waste. Even the current serial, which may be as thin as matting and quite as lifeless, is conducted with snap and quick alternation of scene and speech. We are like guinea pigs in a laboratory with a hundred tests on our brains going on all at once.

Perhaps this is the way of evolution: if so a case-hardened animal will emerge with a mind that reduces shocks automatically as a valve reduces water pressure. It will not be a delicate animal, the delicate ones will all be dead; nor an animal capable of much subjectivity. Jars and rivetings will be its lullaby, an airplane its home, and its con-

ception of privacy will be the rotogravure supplement of the Sunday paper.

This is sheer speculation. No one can forecast mental evolution except in terms of the past, and these do not help us with the new factors in which we are involved. But the effect of what a psychologist might call, in his dialect, contactual saturation is not speculative. It is visible everywhere. We crave it like a drug, and are drugged by it. Women read the tabloid newspapers with the dogged intensity of an opium eater, and can be satisfied only by more. The movie audiences are neurotic pilgrims driven from their homes to escape the dreadful sound of quiet in their ears. To be vegetative, to reflect, to preserve the soul chaste and unassailed by human clamor and contact, is a calamity to be avoided by flight. Traveling daily, hourly, we move in a constant sense of other presences, other thoughts, until our personalities grow callous to friendship and communion, yet itch for the distraction of more contacts still. Talk becomes a grateful noise for us, no more; in hours of enforced leisure the unfortunates turn on the victrola, hook up the radio, so that some external sensation—song, speech, music, what matter what—will be tickling the jaded mind into a sense of activity. Left to themselves our egos are as unhappy as sore thumbs that crave constant pinching.

What principle of chemistry or physics will bolster up our poor minds to these new tensions? Man is the most adaptive of the animals. He will probably come through safely. But there will be queer manifestations of neurosis and lesion in the meantime—especially in those two most sensitive of all the functions of humanity, literature and journalism. We shall do more than dance to the world's jazz. . . .

III. *Literacy*

THE comfortable theory that when illiteracy disappears we shall all be civilized will have to be given up. Substantially all can read now, and see what they read—what acres of barren triviality are printed for their content, what cheap and ever cheaper sensations are made the staple of print, how the newspapers must either struggle for life against the down-dragging of the million-minded animal or endeavor to be first to reach a lower level of vulgarity, how the magazines know the same law! That literacy sharpens intelligence is certain, but that it can paralyze ideas, deaden originality, and substitute flat, fake mimicry of second-hand thinking for what was at least honest instinct, seems also to be demonstrated. No one would seriously advocate a renaissance of illiteracy, yet it had its advantages!

Now that we can all read, and seem so little nearer to civilization, it begins to be evident that what we need is not more facts (of which there is the devil's plenty) but more imagination. The news-reading man knows a little about pretty much everything, and has heard of the rest. The magazine-reading women can talk about the world and his wife and all her concerns. Their information is plentiful, if inaccurate, and they inevitably acquire a marginal interest in whatever ideas are floating loose, and keep their stock ready to circulate, like coins in a purse which are mine today, tomorrow yours. The literate modern can connect his brain, like a telephone, to anything, anywhere. So far, as good as it is; but all his facilities do not enable him to comprehend what is said if it goes beyond the patter of conventional experience. He knows the words, but not what they mean.

Excessive reading of the flat and the flatulent has developed length at the expense of depth. The print-fed modern is shallow and curiously inexpressive of his emotions; by comparison with peasants and primitive types generally he seems to have no emotions that are not echoes of something he has read. His imagination is weak; he does not respond to whatever departs from the expected curve of the movie plot or the standardized idea. He is intelligent but his intelligence weakens as quickly as the brain of the uneducated when it is applied to truth not familiar in print. Indeed, the stuff and nonsense of a gum-chewer's journal cannot be bundled into the human mind day after day without results. The mass of sweepings becomes the mind itself, and it is not surprising that such a type-crammed brain has few responses of its own to make to anger, hate, or love, and is even more incapable of an idea of its own.

We gave the Indian a horse, a rifle, a pair of trousers, and a whisky bottle, and lo! he changed from an interesting savage to a worthless vagabond. We taught what once were the lower classes to read with the expectation that they would become happier, worthier, more useful. They have become more powerful certainly; if they are happier it is not because they have the Daily Murder to read instead of talk with each other. Talk indeed becomes progressively worse as reading increases until literacy has passed into true education, which happens with only one in a thousand. If they are more civilized than before, it is not due to the reading that is chiefly provided for them, since that depicts a Byzantine culture, barbarism painted with culture skin deep. If they are worthier, it is not the ideas they get from their reading which makes them so, for these have the depth and the truth of an electric sign.



The age of belief in mechanical miracles is passing. Machines do not make utopias, democracy is not automatic good government, prosperity is not always progress, and though reading, as Bacon said, maketh a full man, we must question—full of what?

#### IV. *Caveat Emptor*

THE news-stand is the peep hole of the contemporary intellect.

Standing six feet away, we look at rows of conventional pictures like band carving on an Egyptian tomb. They are, in fact, picture writing and spell a primitive message by hieroglyphs. The young girl's figure repeated with variants tells us crudely that youth is desirable; the plump baby hieroglyphs say that infancy is sweet; the semi-nude designs announce that woman's neck and arms are beautiful; the ragged boy symbols remind us of happiness. It is a picture language, and if we had the Egyptians' sense of symbols and the Egyptians' craft, word writing might be dispensed with, even in the advertisements.

Not yet, however. Closer peeping reveals an amazing literature. Here are magazines devoted to what the text calls physical culture and the illustrations reveal as the nude. Beside them, scandal winds like a snake through a dozen periodicals containing vulgar revelations said to be true and vicious desires imperfectly realized. This crude imitation of realism is shot through with mawkish indecency and charged with suggestion to the bursting point. The plain-spoken problem play is heavily moral by comparison. But the writers of this garbage never go beyond suggestion, and are careful not to call a spade a spade. They are pre-censored by experts in the law.

Mixed with this bastard realism is its opposite, wild west romance, naïve, robustious, and as healthy as a painted Santa Claus in a department store window. Hieroglyphic cowboys tirelessly perform for the sedentary, mimicking strenuous life as the gladiators mimicked war for effeminate Romans. Next, like a smear of cosmetics, come the luxury magazines: how to be beautiful, how to be superior, how to be smug. And with them the self-help periodicals: how to be rich easily, how to double your salary, how not to be a failure. These are stuffed with pseudo-psychology, bending that science into quack methods for making a two-by-four brain carry twice its weight.

Amid this fancy dress ball of the pettier emotions are curious contrasts: severe intellectual weeklies, hearthside companions badly printed for crude and homely people, dignified monthlies looking a little shocked, literary reviews cocking a frightened eye at their neighbors, economic journals unaware that they have neighbors, funny papers trying unsuccessfully to outblare the congenitally vulgar, a religious weekly, a deckle-edged pamphlet of unrefined verse.

Nine-tenths of this news-stand is palpable bunkum—some of it honest, good-natured bunkum, written by wise ones who know that life needs a little hokum to keep it sweet; the rest sneaking or scurrilous or impudent bunk.

What does it mean? Why everything, or nothing. This is just the heterogeneous mind of such a populace as great populations have always bred. There is nothing new in its vice or in its virtue except that both in printed form cost less than ever before. There is nothing strange in its confusion of values, nothing surprising in its insistent exaltation of comfort, curiosity, ambition, and lust. Man in the mass is always like that. The alternative would be a herd of standardized machines, grammatical and habit-

ual and colorless, out of which no strong desire, no rebellion, no impatient hope could ever come. Better a lively slum than an eventless factory village. Better blatant vulgarity than respectable nothingness.

If these are the growing pains and thrills of a populace on the way to become civilized, this wayside show case signifies nothing untoward. But if this insolent exploitation of the commonplace mind by easy satisfactions, cheap excitements, and extravagant promises, is trying to be our civilization—well, that may cause reflection!

The cultural powers that be—universities too contemptuous of the popular intellect to explain their sciences, schools which breed the crowds that patronize the news-stands, foundations busy with curing the body and regularizing the mind while the imagination feeds on rubbish, somnolent academies meeting to declare that all is well with literature since some one has written the proper kind of a book—the cultural powers that be never stop before a news-stand. Yet it may blow them—gowns, endowments, chairs, ideals, and decorums to the darkness of the lunar paradise. And while we could make new powers should they leave us, a triumphant news-stand world would be a ghastly place! *Caveat emptor.*

## v. *Dirt*

SINS, of course, have their ups and downs, like the cost of living. Each generation has its pet aversion and saves for that the word immorality. Immorality in the eighteenth century was irreligion, about 1800 in New England it was democracy which was supposed to carry atheism with it, all through the later nineteenth century it meant sexual irregularity, now it is often reserved for

drunkenness. And while one sin gets all the publicity, the others flourish in the shade. While English literature was playing up the calamities that result from illicit love, alcoholism was tightening its grip upon Europe and a greedy materialism was building the foundations of the temple of war. The sin which wrecked Tennyson's ideal kingdom was adultery, but statesmen could commit any crime but the theft of other men's wives.

And now, when the one issue upon which it is possible to stir up moral excitement is prohibition, a vast change has come over our attitude toward sexual aberrations, with little attention except from fanatics who rage whenever a spade is called a spade.

To get rid of the inhibitions of the Victorian period where the writer was not allowed so much as to mention things that every one knew, is a great gain for honest readers and an immeasurable relief for honest authors. But this by no means tells the whole story. In poetry, in the novel, on the stage most of all, the suggestive situation, the risqué line, cynical laughter at restraint, leering praise of the grosser instincts, have an astonishing place in popular favor. They get the laugh, they sell books, plays built upon them succeed, novels compounded of them are sure of discussion. A hardened writer for the public can scarcely hesitate as to what to put in his story if he seeks easy success.

Every news-stand is dripping with magazines the entire purpose of which is to suggest, to arouse, to gratify eroticism under the thinnest veil of a language from which certain words are excluded and by plots which always turn aside before the obvious conclusion. The joint circulation of such magazines is sufficient to put a copy into the hands of one out of every five or ten readers in the United States, yet the sour guardians of the public morals,

who spring upon every serious attempt to show life as it is, ignore the million circulation and attack only the poor intellectual's play or the literary efforts of an erotic who is nevertheless a genius.

The age by comparison with earlier generations is sex-mad (without being necessarily more licentious in deed); a fact at least as worthy of consideration as alcohol percentages or a belief or disbelief in evolution.

This is no argument for censorship. Censorship which goes beyond a law forbidding pornography has always been administered with stupidity and injustice. The suggestive scene will be passed, the honest one censored; poison for the millions will go unnoticed, while art that widens its scope to make passion beautiful or sex tragic will be punished because it is art and makes a ringing example.

This is no argument for indiscriminate suppression. These broad swinging movements of the instinct are seasonal and periodic; they come inevitably and they cure inevitably as the race finds its balance. Not all the puritans of all the ages could check the morbid interest in sex which just now absorbs us, for in part it is a war neurosis, in part it is relief from undue suppressions, in part it is a response to an obscure psychologic change which has shaken youth free from age and negated the sanctions of tradition and experience, in part it is the result of the decay of formal religion and its controls.

Two forces are in conflict and the clear ground between them is not yet broad enough to stand on, a situation which American fiction beautifully illustrates. On one side is the old saccharine sentimentality, where all women are pure in every thought or utterly abandoned, and the hero is virtuous, the villain villainous, in every act. And the readers of such fiction, who number millions still, regard

the mention of a prostitute as a clear evidence of immorality, and a reference to the less wholesome aspects of everyday life as unnecessary and tending to sin. Attack the suggestiveness of many moderns and you play into the hands of hypocrites and sentimentalists.

And on the other side there is the writing described above, seductive, suggestive, based upon a cynical philosophy, and designed to exploit the frailty of human flesh. Defend the notable gains in freedom of expression and honesty of treatment which the pioneers of truth in our generations have secured for art, and you may find yourself enrolled as an apologist for pornography.

Nevertheless, while morality has a variable content from age to age, yet an abandonment to nature has never been the way of advance for civilization. It is not hard to tell whether a book is written to interpret or exploit, whether it is nasty or merely humorous; nor to tell whether a drama is a study of human nature, or a play upon human frailties. The vulgar dirt that floods the magazine market must be condemned. The principle of let the buyer beware must sometimes be accepted lest the innocent suffer with the guilty, but we must educate the buyer as to the nature of his reading. In erotic art (in which we must include "Romeo and Juliet" and the novels of D. H. Lawrence) we must distinguish between the frankness of honesty and nastiness, valuing the art, if it is great, even when decrying the eroticism, recognizing that our sexual unrest must have its vent, but praising neither the unrest nor its outcome, and never forgetting that measure in literature as in life is a virtue which has never been undervalued by time.



VI. *On Fighting*

WE have been taught that man is a creature of his environment who does not make history, but is made by it. It may seem futile, then, to struggle against unfortunate tendencies—against this rising tide of vulgarity in journalism that floods up through newspapers and magazines until sincerity seems old-fashioned and good taste, like good wine, a memory. But these tidal swings, by which the old earth reminds us that we are sprung from her slime and at best crawl permissively upon her surface, are not easily gauged in the present and inscrutable in their effects upon the future. If every American town seems to be imitating Broadway, if sensation mongering is apparently taking the place of news, if education and cultivation appear to be parting company, these calamities may happen—but not necessarily to you. You may always join the minority which refuses to go along. No one had to be a Puritan in Cromwell's time, or an Abolitionist in 1860, or a Republican in 1920. Not all the economics in the world can make a Jeffersonian Democrat out of a congenital Tory.

And even if the printing press seems to be leading a procession toward No Wit's Land where comic strips dance around bonfires of the intellect, yet that may be a delusion. The tide of vulgarity may be just on the turn, and it may recede to leave a beach clean of those pompous mouthings that so often went under the name of literature.

We think, read, write as we can and must, yet it is not futile to talk of better thinking, reading, and writing. The mighty New England preachers rumbled at their congregations that all men were born in sin, and only the few

forechosen by God could be saved, even by grace. If the damned were to be damned and the elect to be saved anyhow, why did they bother to preach at them! And yet the effect was tremendous, for all began to feel the devil's grip and struggle against it.

Once this age knows that the dull fingers of mediocrity are around its neck, that mass production, mass thinking, mass education, mass writing are stalking on like mathematical equations bound to equal an inevitable result; once we see that intellectual damnation may be the fate of most, the struggle to be one of the elect will begin.

Let us fight then, in despite of time, tide, or tendency, against cheap vulgarity in literature. But let us disclaim the reformer's easy distinctions as to what is to be saved and what damned. If the great first cause has foreordained a vital pictorial art to come from the comic strip, or a new literature from "The Saturday Evening Post," why let them come, and welcome. Mark Twain in his time was supposed by New England to be leading American literature down the slope that ends in vulgar banality. Mark's taste was not always of the best, but the Brahmins, it appears, were wrong. At the risk of being once more called tolerant and catholic (bitter words today) let us continue to assert that age is not always, though often, more right than youth, that yesterday's book is not invariably better than today's, that vulgarity is a state of mind, not a group of people one does not like.

And if this be tolerance it is not surrender. It is the dogmatists who change their minds easily. The puritan Calvinists became optimistic humanitarians, but the tolerant Quakers are of the same opinion still. As the reprobate could be distinguished from the elect by his evil nature, so good books have a soundness and savor unmistakable by the open mind, and the shoddy reveals itself to a ready

intuition. The day of the hero in shining armor, cracking skulls with Matthew Arnold and lancing the enemy with a line from Aristotle, is passing. The critic must get down into the press now, which is no longer a cautious battle between polished classicists and modernists, all relatives and likely to change sides, but a crowd milling in confusion, and in danger of suffocation from its own breath. Let him know his own mind and keep his eyes open.

### VII. *Skeptics Wanted*

WE need a third-party movement in this battle for ideas and ideals—the Skeptics. Observers at the cross-roads of thought—journalists, preachers, scholars, editors—know how sharply the currents of recent opinion contradict each other. Conservative and radical in literature no longer speak the same language. To many a cultivated gentleman, Mr. Mencken and his strong-arm men seem a pack of wolves harrying the Graces through the underbrush. Words fail to describe what placid lovers of Charles Lamb or Henry Longfellow seem to the new sophisticates! The young men out of Paris, the hard-boiled intelligentsia, and all those who would rather be accused of a crime than a sentiment, inspire the American bourgeoisie with an indignant horror which would be more freely expressed if they were more articulate. As for the progressive writer who finds that he can sell only stereotyped fiction polished to magazine standards, he would like to lead New York against the Middle West and die spitting a thousand Babbitts on his pen in the inevitable defeat of originality by convention.

The result of all this acrimony is a wide unfairness in criticism. The radicals have been too busy destroying rep-

utations to look to their own standards of judgment. We used to sigh when the hero's feet proved to be of clay, but now it is a signal for rejoicing. Hurrah! Push him over! Bury the mid-Victorians (except Melville who wrote of incest), bury the late Victorians (except Butler who was one of us), bury the 'nineties with Kipling at the bottom of the heap (but not Shaw, who will wriggle and kick), bury Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, and get the firing squad ready for Hardy, Sinclair Lewis, Masfield, and Dreiser. No one who believes in a coherent universe, an intelligible moral system, in humor or in sentiment in a world so obviously devoid of both in its makings, shall keep a reputation if the new sophisticates can destroy it.

As for the conservatives, their weapons are old-fashioned but deadly. Of any book that differs from their accepted code of art and manners they have only to say "unhealthy," "smart," or "dirty," and refuse to buy. They can boycott novelty with the greatest ease, for what the conservatives will not read, cannot be extensively published. In art and manners they are always a majority. Magazines are creatures of advertisement and their life blood is their circulation ratio. (We offer you McCall Street—Ten thousand readers per dollar—A national distribution, etc., etc.) Books are sold by word of mouth chiefly. Tory opinions in literature exercise an influence upon distribution out of all proportion to their validity as criticism.

Do we need more radicals? We did, but not now. Do we need more conservatives? We may soon, but certainly not yet. What is urgently required is a society of honest and intelligent skeptics. Skeptics who can see a benefit in the current smashing of idols, but doubt whether a negative philosophy will be much good to the next generation. Skeptics who can sympathize with the attempt to tell a

story backward, yet doubt the final triumph of Joyce over Dostoievsky. Skeptics who wonder whether it is wise to bury the Victorians too deeply, since much spade work will be necessary in order to dig them up again. (It took half a century to put the Elizabethans back again where they belonged.) And also skeptics who will laugh good-humoredly at the impassioned appeals of conservatives to put an end to all change. Men and women of sufficient perspicacity to know that what every clamorous critic wants is to have his own taste confirmed as right.

But the big job for the Skeptics is to be skeptical of dogmatists. To know that not even the new psychology is going to put all the old truths in the discard. To still read Plato while considering Adler and Jung. To wonder whether the political realists are any more right or wrong than the Emersonian idealists. To note that critics talk about Truth and Reality in exactly the same terms as were used for Romance in the 'nineties. To be suspicious of indignant old gentlemen who say that society is rotting and literature dead. To be skeptical of respectable females who complain that sex is a disease. To be equally skeptical of brash young women who think that all reticent books are abnormal. To wonder, with some chuckling, whether conservatives or radicals have ever read a history of morals, of literature, or of philosophy, or of opinion, with an open mind and a humble heart.

And can a skeptic only be skeptical? Has he no opinions of his own? Rich ones, deep ones, perhaps, but in a time of acrimonious diversity the first effect of his philosophy will be skepticism, for he must be skeptical of most current opinions if he is to stand by his own.

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## THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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### 1. *Scholarship*

RESEARCH is always on the tongue of university faculties, but we hear less of scholarship. That shamed doubt as to the ultimate value of literary history or linguistic science which lurks at the heart of all universities takes courage at the sight of print. Those who lack the imagination to estimate the imponderable results of scholarship can count pages and note the discovery of important or trivial facts. Pamphlets, monographs, books, can be named in bibliographies, have the look, at least, of permanence, like a college dormitory or a monument. Alas, there is no permanence in them. Research sheds its tiny beam of light and then goes out, like a match struck to show the path by night. The great works which distinguished our elders, the first American scholars, gather dust in the libraries, but their life has gone into later books; the thousand bits of snapped-up, unconsidered knowledge, having testified once that their makers were "producing scholars," turn yellow in oblivion.

Scholarship means more than discovery. Scholarship is the scholarly mind, which may at will make books or men. The consummate fruit of scholarship may be a great book, or it may be a generation taught to think straight



and austere. The ripe fruit of investigation comes late, is rare at best. What one may hope for in the learned world is not genius often, but true scholarship always, and whether published in paper covers or bound into the minds of learners is all one in the sight of the Lord, provided—a large proviso—that the printed document has the value of the trained mind.

American universities have not yet come to the side of the angels in this respect. They have been blind to the hours of thought and investigation used up in the teaching of youth, a task as exigent of scholarship as the editing of a text, and more productive. They have urged the young scholar to publish books because they were unable or unwilling to judge of his work with men, and wished evidence that could be read and passed on in a trice. They would rate a preacher by the sermons he printed, not the souls he saved. And they have asked that the young scholar should turn his scholarship into print at the very moment when, if he is a man and a real scholar, every ounce of energy is absorbed in preparation and in teaching. Of the two channels for the precious energy of scholarship it is print that leads towards recognition—and a professorship.

The born writer will write despite all handicaps, the born scholar will sooner or later harvest his discoveries in print, the born teacher will be a scholar also. Yet the platitude that good teachers must be good scholars also should not be used to frighten into premature publication. The rewards of academic life should go to a scholarship not to be defined by numbered pages nor limited to the accumulation of facts. Good teaching requires scholarship, is itself scholarship. To say to the young man, Go teach, perform an act of scholarship upon the young but do not go too far, restrain your zeal, conserve your energies,

prove that you are a scholar by the recording of facts, however trivial, in print, or we will not believe in your scholarship, is to utter very serious nonsense. It is to cry on and off. It is to urge every man to do two things at once, and equally well. It is to send a youth into battle, and judge him by the cut of his uniform.

One of our great delusions is that we need more published research from American universities. The quantity (not the quality) is already twice too great. What we need, and need bitterly, is more scholarship soundly based and rightly directed, and we need it not only in books or other monuments to reputation but in the classroom where are its greatest victories, and best chances for enduring service. If universities can recognize the scholarly mind only when they see it bound and printed, let them call in a psychologist, or begin to use their own good common sense. But it is not only the university that is at fault.

## II.

THERE is no essay ever written on this continent more often praised, more often quoted, than Emerson's "The American Scholar." There is no utterance of the American mind so ironic in its unfulfilment, so unprophetic of our later history, so completely misread by those who praise it.

In the rhetoric of Commencement speeches, Emerson has become a voice proclaiming the independence of the American mind and the self-sufficiency of native scholarship:—"We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds"—and the patriotism which applauds from the auditorium this quotation will a few minutes later cheer the indus-

trialist who says that we build the most and the best automobiles in the world.

Emerson would not be pleased. He was more interested in scholarship than in garlands for America. He wrote his lecture not to celebrate an accomplished fact, but to specify what the American scholar should become—a creative intellect, not a promoter or a manifolder of material welfare; a man thinking, not a bookworm however self-sufficient; an original mind escaping from the dominance of past genius and well aware that each generation must write its own books. “Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books.” When the American scholar should become the man thinking it was this which was to be changed. Not nationalism, but originality and self-dependence was the theme of his famous essay.

Has the American scholar become the “man thinking”? Has he recast his environment and wrought so that “young men of the fairest promise” are no longer “hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire”; has he made the air we breathe less “thick and fat” with “private avarice,” or taught the mind of this country to aim no longer at “low objects”?

Poor scholars, let us not ask too much of them! They have had the Civil War, its exhaustion of idealism and its shattering of the continuity of American culture; they have had the swarming illiterates of Europe; they have had the wild exploitation of the loot of a continent, when to get rich was a by-product of activity; they have had the problem of wholesale education on their hands. And while they were struggling with their books, science went into

the laboratory and conquered the world. Emerson announced his program too soon; his mine exploded in an empty harbor, but there is dynamite in him still.

To survey American scholarship, even literary scholarship, is a task for a foundation, nor do I take comfort from Emerson's confident benediction that pecuniary foundations can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit, for it is impossible to be witty over the vast museum of facts which since his day the literary scholar—a man working like the devil, if not always, or often, a man thinking—has piled up in books and pamphlets. Instead, and for the purpose of this brief note upon Progress, let me review a single number of the most representative journal of American literary scholarship up to date.

I shall not review it for the competence of its facts, for these only a specialist can judge (and often only a specialist be interested in), but rather for the cause, the use of these assembled facts, for the philosophy of work and the philosophy of purpose which inspire these American scholars who, like maggots in a cheese, are boring away oblivious while science walks off with the literary bag.

In a request for bibliographies of "productions" by its faculty, a great university recently stated that only articles or books which "contributed to knowledge" should be included, articles for "popular magazines," book reviews, and all creative work which did not give new facts were directly or by implication excluded. This is the usual specification for literary scholarship in America, and the condition for advancement in American universities. There must be a contribution to knowledge. Knowledge of what? Not life, for then poetry, fiction, even the literary essay or criticism of contemporary literature would be legal tender; but not even when written by those whose business it is to teach the writing of English are such

gauds given more than perfunctory credit. Indeed it was said ten years ago by a scholar, himself a stifled poet, that it was better for a student of English never to write at all than to depart from the pursuit of facts. Knowledge of books then, of that wise kind which, half intuition, half deduction from the requisite facts, leads toward criticism, prophecy perhaps, certainly to what Emerson calls creative reading? Alas, there has been too little of this in American scholarship to answer confidently, but the omens for the beginner are inauspicious. "Candidates for the Ph.D. are warned not to undertake criticism." Considering all things that dictum may be wise, but it is not only youth that in American scholarship is warned to crib, cabin, and confine the imagination.

What, then, is this desideratum, knowledge? Let us search for it in the publications of The Modern Language Association, which contain by general consent what "gowns and pecuniary foundations" regard as the proper output of the producing scholar in America and his natural function. Here, well edited, occasionally well written, are the contributions from California to Maine of the grandsons and granddaughters of Emerson's scholar. It is these papers that are legal tender in bibliographies, exchangeable for salary checks and promotions. Here is the corpus from which one can argue the presence or absence of a soul. If the sum total is naturally less in excellence than selected books of selected writers, it differs only in degree not in kind, and clearly represents the effort of an able editor to secure the best available in oncoming scholarship. The test is a fair one, for we are seeking, not the best that can be done in a certain way, but the way itself and where it leads.

The first article in the number of the Publications before me is a study of the legend of Joseph of Egypt as it



appears in Old and Middle English. Twenty-five pages assemble the evidence for all the variants of the story, and prove that Joseph's reputation was protected with loving care. It is, in spite of the forbidding texts through which it ranges, a more amiable investigation than that type specimen of academic futility, the pursuit of an Aesopian fable and its variants through the centuries, along the trail of an error in spelling or the substitution of a lion for a bear.

The next article endeavors to establish the identity of the Pearl in the early English poem of that name, and the authorship thereof. It is modest and, if inconclusive, advances knowledge in a field which, if tiny, is worth cultivating—an excellent example of what our American scholars are doing, well done. The third article proves that Gilbert Pilkington cannot be proved to have written the Second Shepherd's play. The fourth minutely describes the manuscript of the Towneley plays of the same period. The fifth is a treatise on a treatise on how to date more of these early plays. Results are negative. The sixth recounts the unimportant activities of Waller the poet in the Royal Society. The seventh carefully uncovers the contemporary satire in a dead masterpiece, Otway's "Venice Preserved." With the eighth, interest mounts, for its thoughtful study of neo-classicism explains the Augustan interregnum between individualism and romance when one had to be classic or nothing. Number IX is an account of Brooke, who wrote "The Fool of Quality," most sentimental of novels, and tried to turn eighteenth century science into poetry. "Brooke blindly fumbled at the concepts which the problem of reconciling evolution with a spiritual creed has endowed with modern significance." In X, Melchior Grimm is shown to have gone to France because he liked it, not as an apostle of German literature.



In XI, by close reasoning it is proved that Diderot probably didn't write a review of Lessing's "Miss Sara Sampson" (a paper *on* a book review is legal tender). In XII, Sheridan is accused of poaching from two contemporaries. XIII is a minute and immense analysis of Ritson's "Life of King Arthur." The book is unimportant, but shows "the continuity of interest in Arthur." XIV is a study of some sources of "René"; XV, a detailed account of American writings between 1783-1833 which happened to be republished in England; XVI a study as to why *des jeunes gens* came to mean young *men* instead of young *people*. The last paper, a highly technical analysis of the choriambus in English verse, is a contribution to the complexity of English rhythms, which, no matter how readily a poet writes them, have proved under analysis to be problems for the psychologist and the mathematician.

It is easy to loose sarcasm upon some of these endeavors to beat dust from a recalcitrant past, but that is a layman's attitude. The ideal of scientific scholarship is truth. If Diderot did not write that review, there is one fact nailed on the wall of print. Some false deduction as to eighteenth-century philosophy may stop there and go no further. If the Towneley plays can be redated, or can't be redated, why there is one tiny beam of light (misty to be sure) on a hidden corner of an obscure period. If the eighteenth century was static in criticism, there is one basis for contrast with our own.

No, to say that literary scholarship as it is practiced in our universities is trivial, to say that it is pursued without sense of proportion, to say that the professor at work upon the remote and not too important sources of a difficult and mediocre work resembles the morning commuter exercising his brains upon a cross-word puzzle, has a sting of truth, but is not entirely just. Nothing comes out of the

puzzle but mental absorption and a group of words. From the most trivial discovery in the history of literature some light, some truth, some useful application to the only life we live, our own, may spring—if the man thinking chances to come upon it, and is able to change a dead fact into a thought!

We may admit that scholars, like many children, love puzzles, and still find their task defensible. Source seeking, text building, error quashing is the adolescence of scholarship, but it is also the preface to wisdom. It is not childish unless the adult mind sticks there and can move no further.

If “in silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction . . . the scholar adds observation to observation . . . happy enough if he can satisfy himself alone that this day he has seen something truly,” if this vast labor of accumulated fact were in the hands of the dedicate, willing sacrifices to the possibilities of experiment, following knowledge down its faintest trail over dustiest ground, regardless of utility, we might still question the orientation of the endeavor, yet praise the devotees. It was such a dedication that led the monks to the desert.

But this “productivity,” this assembling of literary fact for the sake of accuracy in inessentials as well as essentials, is not the work of dedicated hands, it is the total expectation in scholarship from tens of thousands of men and women actively engaged in teaching literature and language to youth. This is their testing ground; here, unlike the monks, is their way of earthly, not heavenly, promotion. They may write profitable text books, they may teach with the lips of angels, they may be conduits of literary emotion, but as scholars, here they must engage, here be judged. In these papers is the erudite mystery which makes doctors’ theses; in doctors’ degrees and more such

treatises lie advancement and justification of the pleasant academic life.

The tide of literary facts mounts ever higher. In the documents of the Middle Ages were found the tightest puzzles for youthful investigation, but these are nearly exhausted. The wave of research sweeps through the darker corners of the Renaissance, breaks over the eighteenth century, eddies over the nineteenth, curls round contemporary literature but draws back. There is lack of dignity in immediate problems, and danger too. A neat demonstration of the gullibility of mere literary critics who believed in the South America of Aphra Behn held good until new documents were found to upset it, but a geographical analysis of a living author's poems lasted only long enough to reach his indignant denials. And so, with a hungry roar, the tide bursts through the virgin fields of American literature, seeking not the great problems—Melville, Poe, Thoreau, the nature, if any, of the American mind,—but mediocrities whose works out of happy neglect had been left untidy, third-rate poets without biographies, defunct and uncatalogued magazines, texts corrupt because they were not worth correcting.

I do not wish to seem perverse in wholesale recrimination, for I am well aware of the utility of spade work, and the honorable necessity of insignificant facts. And indeed I condemn no single work or single man, not even the errors of my own past. There is an argument for every investigation, however narrow, even for the minutest editing of the style of the first Montgomery Ward catalogue.

It is not perversity. The wrong is in the whole not in the part. The fallacy is in the philosophy which underlies this scholarship so laborious and so partial. It is the aim not the work which is at fault. It is not the motives (though we may often suspect them) but the definition of

a literary scholar upon which the entire edifice of research, reward, and justification rests.

For it should be clear to us, and it would certainly be clear to a resurrected Emerson, that the American scholar has embraced one cold ideal in the past half century and let the rest go glimmering. He has made himself scientist. He has gone to the chemist's laboratory and learned of him. He has thrown aside intuition for experiment, given over interpretation for discovery, let go his conception of a Whole in order to concentrate upon minutest Parts. If the impression of a tooth and a wing upon a piece of slate could redraw the evolutionary line, why then the rummage of an ancient manuscript, the negative proof of an authorship, the reconstruction of a text, may remake literary history, and explain literature. The physicists in a bit of mud have discovered a new earth and perhaps a new heaven. When they ceased being philosophers they began to be great. Let us go and do likewise.

No student of the past decades can doubt the justice of this parallel. The question is not of the value of scientific method in scholarship, for that, even in the few papers discussed above, is obvious; the question is whether literary scholarship and science are synonymous terms as "gowns and pecuniary foundations" have agreed in these years to believe. For if they are not, then, in spite of the benefits accruing to literary history from our half century of accumulated fact, we are indeed deluded.

They are not. That statement can be made with complete dogmatism. The business of science is to measure fact, to uncover the nature of *things*, to provide a technique for the control of nature itself. In this it has been brilliantly successful on a scale and a scope so wide that the rewriting of literary history—which has been the sole business of the American scholar—is only the least part

of its total endeavor. And science in pursuit of its legitimate business has come to the frontiers of knowledge. It has proved the non-existence of matter, destroyed materialism, and demonstrated its inability to explain the relation of nature to mind (since neither in scientific terms exists). It has vast triumphs still before it in the discovery of processes, but in relativities and causations it has already called upon the metaphysicians for aid. "Physic of Metaphysic begs defence" as Pope prophetically wrote in the classic attack upon unilluminated scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

Thinkers about science are already arising who propose to function beyond the possibility of experiment.

But literature, except in the restricted area where it deals with and is based upon facts, has always been beyond proof, though not beyond reason. Its stuff and substance has never been dates, circumstances, sources, and reference, although the scientific scholar has been able to show how necessary is a right understanding of such matters to just appreciation. It is made of imagination, intuition, emotion, and prophecy; it is instinct with beauty, and the power of idea—indeed with precisely those intangibles which can be approached, but not controlled, by fact. It has a living relation to all life, and can no more be fully explained by its facts than life itself, which is a collocation of force exhibiting especial "pushiness," atoms swarming under laws which do not explain them, nor always hold,

<sup>1</sup> "The Dunciad" lends itself to apt quotation, with a substitution of names; but I will try to be more just than Pope and leave blanks where his malice pilloried scholars who were useful even if they were dull—

"The critic eye, that microscope of wit,  
See hairs and pores, examines bit by bit:  
How parts relate to parts, or they to whole,  
The body's harmony, the beaming soul,  
Are things which —, —, — shall see,  
When man's whole frame is obvious to a flea."



non-matter synthesizing into an entity—a thing beyond experiment except as to its processes.

I say then that literary scholarship in America<sup>1</sup> is precisely like those mercantilists of the eighteenth century who based their world policy upon a theory of limited application and brought the economic and political structure crashing on their heads. It has given its all to science when its part was less than science and its all more. It has wisely gone into the laboratory for aid, but most unwisely never come out. It has pinned all of literature to a fact, when a fact is not all of literature.

That is why we Americans have done more than our share in the rewriting of the history of English literature, and left that literature as art, as ideas, as emotion, pretty much where we found it. That is why if one wants to study literature *per se*, and not history, it is to essays long ago written (and usually for "popular" magazines) to which one turns, not to the transactions of learned societies, or if to them, to articles strangely out of place in a collection of factual evidence.

And the effect upon the profession of literary scholarship has been deadening; not so deadening as it might be, however, for if the American scholar has conformed in his production, his mind has been free. It is a commonplace that professors of literature go to their annual meetings, not to hear papers, but to talk. Talk, the mere talk of trained minds, who have profited by science, but know they must transcend it, has been more valuable, perhaps, in recent America than all our scholarly print. And much of it, fortunately, has passed on into teaching.

It is high time to see more clearly, to give the scientific

<sup>1</sup> And in England and Germany, and, in a less degree, France also. I aim this general criticism at America because of my greater familiarity with American circumstance.



scholar his due, for we do not wish to go back to the easy days of rhetoric and insufficient generalization, when Matthew Arnold could write upon Celtic literature without knowing a word of Celtic;—time to turn some portion of our great energy away from the accurate recording of literary history to the study of literature itself. Or shall we wait until our masters, the scientists, have preceded us?—until they return from beyond the atom to seek in the only perfect expression of mind, which is literature, some explanation of phenomena irreducible by law and experiment? When the metaphysicians follow we may bestir ourselves. Already philosophers like Croce and Whitehead, mathematicians, psychologists, are becoming our critics of literature.

“The old oracle said, ‘All things have two handles: beware of the wrong one.’ . . . The scholar should be the delegated intellect whose business it is to correlate thinking. In the degenerate state . . . he tends to become . . . the parrot of other men’s thinking.”

The history of these ninety years should teach the scholar that science is a good handle, but not the only one. He grasped it, and proposed to move mountains. He has set some history in order, found the missing toe bones and arranged the skeleton. But now a brood of parrots searches the bushes for splinters. He must grasp the other handle or accept sterility—and he is none too virile now.

But the horizon is not too dark. Universities, fumbling toward the light, ask poets, essayists, playwrights to live and talk with them, and no questions asked except that they should be what they are. The poets should be inside the universities, for scholars in literature should be poets even if they never write a line of verse. We have the men and the minds to make use of this heavy load of investigation, even though a generation of creative youth has

been driven from scholarship by disillusionment more bitter than economic necessity. We have the scientific training, although one suspects it is a second-hand and somewhat stale science. Yet it, or a better training in scientific methods, is indispensable, for if the area of literature in which facts count is small, it is the very clearing with which the garden of wisdom begins. Let us shake off this obsessive superstition that he who finds a date is saved, and may rest in salvation. Yes, we have settled *hoti's* business (and a side-street affair it has proved): it is time to take up Pindar and Aeschylus and the life and art for which *hoti* was made.

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## LITERATURE ABROAD

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### I. *France*

IN France they are discussing whether so and so has turned Catholic, and what effect it will have upon his style. The old coteries are broken, the old leaders dead or discredited, writers group themselves around publishers, with scarcely distinguishable aims. A metaphysics of language which concerns itself with the accuracy of expression and neglects the thing to be expressed absorbs the finer talents. No books of range and scope appear in French. Impressions of America, or tropical Africa, or the underworld of the ports or of Brussels are wrought into nervous sets of phrases each trying to catch the light and all reflecting a skeptical temperament that believes nothing of the world except that it can strike the senses. Valéry sets down in lapidary phrases a fine, thin summary—too logical, too final—of the theory that Spengler in an earlier period built crudely from a mass of generalized evidence. The German disgorges facts by the ton and is too busy with his material to refine upon his hypothesis. With the Frenchman, truth seems to depend upon the placing of an adjective. It is a French generation wounded, tired, weak, which in default of energy will be fine. If it has little to say and doubts the utility of both theories and

emotions, at least it can improve the instrument of saying. If there is no game to be hunted, we clean the guns and sharpen the knives.

France for the moment is absorbed in physical recovery and advance. Factories, mines, vineyards, olives, wheat, forests obsess the national thought. There is little margin of generous thinking, and only a reluctant interest in the outer world. The magnificent system of French culture functions: the right words are said, right ideas taught; the French intellect wherever applied is always superior, if not invariably right, or even excellent. In a thousand French villages and towns are a thousand war memorials of which almost none is ugly and most are beautiful. The French genius is too competent to fall below its minimum. But that genius is pallid and tired. In art, it does the needful without much interest. Words and lines excite it more than ideas and human nature.

The great industrialists share the really vital energy of this new France with the absorbed millions of toilers. Their names are unknown except when affixed to an automobile or a world allying trust, but they, with the workers, are France—for the moment. The *littérateurs* are the playboys of the time. No national literature at this instant exists—not so much as in America, not nearly so much as in England; but the never interrupted restlessness of the French intellect goes on—even though its roots are no deeper than the Parisian café pavement—refining, speculating, innovating with words if there are no things, with phrases where ideas are lacking.

France today is epitomized in any one of a hundred provincial newspapers. Spread upon four sheets, well arranged and badly printed, one-half the paper is such collected junk of anecdote, gossip, fashions, sports, pictures, and local items as must be fed daily to every modern

community. For the rest, the humblest journal covers in detail the crops, the manufactures, the stock markets of all France. This is vital. But the half page of news at the back is not vital. It is a jumble of casual paragraphs—a factory burnt in Jugo-Slavia, a revolution in Vienna (two paragraphs), three bicyclists killed in Utah, the vice president of Ireland (name misspelled) shot, a storm in the valley of the Ariège, a murder in Marseilles. France is not interested in news of the world, or even in news of herself not industrial. France cultivates her garden and looks over the fence only in vacant moments, and then with suspicion or dislike.

It is a beautiful garden, excellently cultivated. But the French intellect has to live there, and the French man of letters leaves it only to try the effect upon his garden mind of new impressions which he can work up later in the café corner. A recent anthology of French contemporary prose is full of such clippings—impressionistic, beautifully phrased, reflecting in instance after instance a futilitarian philosophy which implies that in an incoherent universe the surface life is the only tangible, and that to phrase its reflections beautifully is the highest good. It is, if you please, an esthetic provincialism which results in skeptic minds, doubtful of any ultimate values, and certain only of French taste and the French intellect. Weary of world ideas and world conflicts, an instinctive faith in the certain value of perfection no matter what is to be perfected keeps French literature going until energy shall again flow into sensitive brains overtaxed by brutal living. And this means until new minds fill the gaps of war.

France can never be silent, the lucid, logical French mind can never fail to analyze with a clarity not granted to us who use English, French invention must always experiment, and sometimes draw the world after it, but

the energy of France for the moment is elsewhere. Not books but the green carpet of vines on the Mediterranean shore; not political ideas but the new industrialization of innumerable valleys; not poetry but expansion in Africa. The strong men are busy silently: the writers, like Paris itself, while every hectaire blooms in the provinces and factories rise, are a little worn and discouraged, more than a little self-regarding and self-conscious, febrile not virile, skillful but not impressive. As Voltaire said in an earlier time of disillusionment, "Il faut cultiver notre jardin," and that, literally, is what France is doing now.

## II. *England*

THERE are two Englands: the England of Galsworthy, Wells, and Bennett, of Shaw and Hardy and Barrie; and the England of the young (or youngish) intellectuals, of Aldous Huxley and the Sitwells, of Strachey, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, of David Garnett and his attendant miniaturists, of Joyce and the Joyceans. It is a literary England divided and subdivided into coteries through which figures of noble independence sail unperturbed—Tomlinson, the late C. E. Montague, E. M. Forster, de la Mare—and where some of the older generation are perennially young and some of the new generation are prematurely and preternaturally old. Yet the difference between the prophets and the sons of the prophets is as wide as the rift across which old Milton looked at Dryden, saying, "Yes, you may tag my verses."

For it is already clear that the generation of Wells and Shaw wrote and still write in that great Victorian tradition which ordained that the poet and novelist and playwright should be spokesmen for England, and if for Eng-



land, for the world. Their conception of literature is social. Social ideas obsess them as they obsessed Byron and Shelley. The reforming spirit is ever hot in their breasts, nor are they ever far from philosophy. They are not troubadours, or wits, or paragraphists, but literary statesmen. Hardy legislated for Fate, Wells legislates for God, Shaw for Reason. They are all poet laureates with a felt duty to England and humanity. And their literature reflects the nineteenth century greatness of England, the power of an empire loosely hung and badly organized but functioning on the plane of greatness, self-confident, energetic, generous. Sure of a future because they have seen a great past, they are prolific of books, and little troubled by artistic inhibitions, for their energy sweeps them aside. The War, that froze or parched the younger men and women, gave them new dangers, new opportunities for theme, and their minds, accustomed to the world-thinking of an imperial England, rose refreshed for another span of active life. Wells dropped studies of marriage for histories of the world, Galsworthy began to sum up his era in the "Forsyte Saga," Shaw became a prophet of a grandiose future, Gilbert Murray left Athens for Geneva, only Barrie's gentle humor was quenched by the new seriousness.

The statesmen of British literature have no successors. The political intellectuals of England have deserted literature for economics, Liberalism has given way to Socialism, Toryism to Capitalism, and by neither is the creative imagination urged to generous expression. Literature in young England has retired to its closet to write its diary and refine its style. The newer writers are negative by instinct and by choice. They are early old and wilted by the strains of war. In the survivors of the great conflict the springs of generous energy have dried up; they are

parsimonious of their enthusiasms, and quite unwilling to spend themselves upon the idealizing of a world which shook down their youth.

Furthermore, they live in a precarious England which is still the brains, but no longer the cause, of an empire. The peak of British self-confidence is behind them; having known collapse, they have no taste for glory, no expectation of leadership, no pride in the possibilities of an English-speaking world of which England is only a factor. They were born too late for the Periclean grandeurs and view Alexandrian dreams with skeptical dislike.

In the meantime, like the French, they cultivate their gardens, but not in the same way, nor for the same reason. The political and social ideas of England are still grandiose, and may, like the culture of the Greeks, have new victories dated long after the supremacy of the race that made them. In spite of the new vigor of English trade which is struggling across strikes and unemployment to its world markets again, it is not true that the major energy of England today is industrial. It is still a home of ideas powerfully invented—perhaps more now than ever.

But the new literary England is in its study trying to recapture the cutting edge of eighteenth-century satire, writing brief exquisite replicas of earlier styles, studying the weaknesses of Victorian enthusiasm with cold and critical subtlety, lest any great man escape with his adjective still tied to him, closing one eye to get a fresh view of human nature, and rearranging our English phrases in the attempt to express the nuances and the aberrations which the careless elders left untouched. Wit has come into fashion again and a *mot* is broadcast over London.

Since morality, politics, philosophy, and religion are unfashionable except in their negatives, the literary crafts-

man, freed from these grave responsibilities, has time to consider his art. The language of this middle generation is sharp and careful. By comparison, Wells sprawls, Shaw is sometimes crude, Hardy often dull, and the Victorians are convicted of empty sonorousness or sentimental rhetoric. There is no padding in Virginia Woolf, for the details, trivial though they may be, are carefully chosen. There is no Swinburnian sonorousness in Edith Sitwell or Humbert Wolfe, for a phase of a phase, not the adumbration of a great idea, is what they seek. This new literature is fine not strong, subtle not rich, critical of results rather than imaginative in causes. And it is literary literature, an art form, where the craftsman in words has too obviously a contempt for blundering souls who pour out an unreflecting style in the interest of mankind. It is a closet literature.

There is small chance of greatness in this highly professional writing of English, but that does not condemn it. After the loose journalism of H. G. Wells, a Virginia Woolf and an Aldous Huxley were inevitable, and the easy good humor of Barrie leads around the corner to the Sitwells. Every Macaulay has his Strachey, or should have, and if language becomes propaganda some one has to reduce it to language again. The criticism to be made upon the salon school of English literature is of its self-sufficiency, not its usefulness. It has borrowed an intellectual provincialism from France which makes it content to let the world take care of itself while London refines its accent and its taste. The natural result is that the British literati begin to take in each other's washing. Or if that becomes too unprofitable, the highbrows write for the lowbrows in all the cheaper newspapers, content to make their work popular by diluting to a local taste. The high-

brows are catering to the lowbrows or each other, said an acute English critic, the broadbrows in literature will soon be extinct.

The lions of pre-war England still roar from their lairs, but leopards possess the jungle.

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## STYLE IN ENGLISH

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### I. *Pure English*

DELIGHT in style as such is rare. Purists seldom enjoy it. They take their pleasures sadly, and can be stirred to real emotion only by a mistake in grammar or a rank colloquialism. The English of professional purists is like the pronunciation of elocutionists; its smooth perfection slips off the understanding. Thoreau preferred the conversation of a wood-chopper to the rhapsodies of nature lovers, and honest lovers of English prefer downright language, even when harsh, to minced and colorless perfection.

Correct English may be very bad English. There is a dressed and formal diction, as colorful as a concrete walk, which children must endure in their textbooks. The worst slang is often more expressive than what they have to read. There is the empty suavity of sales-letter English, which plays upon tastes formed by a bad education. And there is editorial and political English, just a little swollen with oratory, just a little seasoned with literature, every sentence hand-made, but as tasteless as a mail-order cake.

A writer who keeps his thoughts commonplace and says only what others have said before him, can master correct English with very little difficulty. Avoid figures,

use no phrase that is heard in talk unless it has been seen in print, write always in general terms, keep the vocabulary small, and the grammar simple. Listen to the radio and read a good text-book.

But it is excessively difficult to write pure English. "Pure," in this sense, as elsewhere, has a moral rather than a chemical significance, and implies responsibility for the full meaning of every English word. And what histories can be written of those meanings! The writer of pure English chooses his words with a consciousness of life in every syllable. It is not enough for him that a verb takes the accusative, or that "admire" in a modern dictionary has one very simple meaning. He feels the Latin in his tongue, tastes the rough and concrete Norman or Anglo-Saxon of the monosyllables, knows that "thrill" is a boring upon a bone, remembers the courtliness of courtesy, and in his choice of rhythms lets the sense be reflected in the sound. How else, with such a heritage, can his English be exigent of its own great powers?

We—or our school systems—have manufactured American purists of a particularly objectionable type. Educated by modes of an English style written by men in an environment utterly different from their own, these pedagogues have reduced the parliamentary diction of Macaulay or the precise dignity of George Eliot to an empty correctness. They can imitate only the mechanisms of such styles; the spirit escapes them and they have no vital spirit of their own. The models of American prose have been generally neglected. Emerson's fine rhetoric reënforced by New Englandisms, Thoreau's magnificent terseness, Poe's whip-like sentences, Mark Twain's expressive colloquialism—these writers were closer to our needs, but the staccato of a new prose, the rise and dip from the homely to the tense, the new locutions slipping in from familiar



speech, seemed to our purists irregular or inelegant. They are of that breed which preferred Everett's rhetoric to Lincoln's great prose on the day of the Gettysburg address, for Everett spoke in terms that any American nurtured upon Burke and the English historians could recognize as oratory. The purest English of the nineteenth century in the true sense of "pure," is probably to be found in Thoreau's "Walden."

There are two possible ideas of good English. The first is delightfully simple and was phrased with delicious naïveté by the editor of the English "New Statesman," at the close of an Anglo-American Conference on English held in London in June of 1927. Good English, he said in effect, is English written or spoken by good Englishmen—not Americans, not Canadians, not Scotchmen (the reference was to an editor of *The New Oxford Dictionary* present at the Conference), not Irishmen (he meant Bernard Shaw). His editorial was short, but at its close the circle was visibly shrinking. Not North Englishmen, for to an American ear their English differs from the Southern tongue, not Oxford or Cambridge English, for their accents violently disagree, not cockney (one hopes), not parliamentary or London City English certainly! English, it appears, as a logical conclusion, is the language of "The New Statesman." It was thus that in a geography for children published in the proud, but declining city of Charleston, the Atlantic Ocean was defined as "a body of water into which flow the Ashley and the Cooper Rivers"!

The other possible idea of good English for an American, a Scotchman, or a Londoner, is that his English shall be true, both to its great inheritance, and to the taste and sense and blood and rhythm of life that are his own.

## II. *Good English*

**T**HERE is no finer instrument than the English language, none capable of a greater range of perfect expression. It can be made sweet or vigorous, connotative or precise. It is entirely responsive to the mind that plays upon it.

Grammar is the mechanics of this expressiveness and rhetoric its design. When made into treatises and applied like an automatic player to a baby grand, they can teach any literate person to patter correct English, with emphasis not misplaced and unity not violated and coherence enough to read by. Yet reviewers are always complaining that their victims are ungrammatical. What they too often mean is that the grammar, or more usually the rhetoric, is not according to arbitrary rule—infinitives are split, prepositions slid to sentence ends, conjunctions open paragraphs. Many such rules were invented by nineteenth-century purists who believed that language was no living organism but a machine that could be improved by logic and reformed by decree. The late Professor Lounsbury, battling almost alone against the pedants, proved that many a schoolmarm's rule was foreign to the history and the genius of the language, yet men who read their English Bible and their English Shakespeare, and know by heart the words of Lincoln, continue to repeat, as authoritative, restrictions invented by schoolmen whose minds could not flow with the tongue.

Good grammar according to undisputed usage, and rhetoric correct if not excellent, are as common as phonograph records, and much the same in nature. They can be hired at no more cost than a commercial stenographer, and for the same reason—the training that produces them is mechanical. Even the use of shall and will, of who and

whom, of the subjunctive, can be rammed into a thick skull by percussion methods in less time than it takes to teach cube root or a French irregular verb. Good grammar is cheap; a correct arrangement of words not costly.

But good writing is dear and an excellent use of this marvelous English is difficult. Grammar alone will never make English sweet upon the tongue, and when Chaucer wrote of Petrarch who filled all Italy with "rhetorike sweete" he did not mean the rhetoric which lets a sentence run but will never help it to mount. There must be that absolute precision in words which touches the wrong note never, and of the multitude of sounds chooses one and that the best. The approximately correct, and entirely colorless, English of so much modern writing reveals, on careful listening, too many blurred notes. It is clear but not lucid. The language has been made to yield not half of its expressiveness, and a cunning mind could annotate phrase after phrase with words that would subtly unlock the thought. Or the ideas may be sticky with adjectives that overqualify while the sentences jerk from worn metaphor to lazy simile. An ingenious story teller like O. Henry is such a sloven in words that his fame is already tainted by his own carelessness. He must live by his plots, not his style, and may gain that dubious immortality of the lesser Italians whose stories were borrowed by writers that could make them immortal. A great artist, Kipling, strains his noble language into eccentricity, and must lighten his ballast before he sets sail among the classics.

As for the rhythm which carries the thought into emotion as the rhythm of music supports the theme, and that happy disposition of words which lifts the idea, not huddled but ordered, into the mind of the reader, these graces belong in the common estimation to style, which is something esoteric and not to be practiced by plain men nor

desired by the rough and ready. Style depends upon such graces of course, but so does good English, for without fitting order no language can serve to its capacity. The Middle Ages knew Latin words but could not make good prose of them because the sense of Roman rhythm and Roman order was lost.

And we who live in an unceasing storm of words until the eye cannot escape print or the ear sound, are in danger of mistaking vocabulary and syntax for good English. We are content if our writers are not ungrammatical, not obscure, not crude, not misleading—all the negative virtues; and a million pages fulfil these easy requirements, wherein the lonely story teller, the unsuspected columnist, or the obscure reporter who respects his language and can use it, has no distinction. A taste and a positive demand for English that is good, not good enough, must be revived. There are writers left to satisfy it who have never bowed the knee to Baal.

### III. *The Writing of English*

IF RHETORICS, composition books, manuals, guides could of themselves assure the writing of good English, our prose style should now be purer than Chaucer's well; but a multitude of text-books is no more a guarantee of good writing than a million of books on etiquette is a warrant of good manners. It remains to be proved that the congregations who heard two sermons each Sunday were more moral than their agnostic descendants.

That there is so much imperfect English, after such a pressure of honest endeavor in teaching, is best explained by the vast number now to be educated, who in the past would not have written at all, and who may properly re-

gard their slovenly grammar and stilted phrasing as so much won from illiteracy. But what of the more fortunately gifted who surely with the impact of so many books, such determined counselors from text-books up to correspondence courses for the middle-aged, should have developed a new prose style for modern America and justified the concern of their elders? We have good writers of course, but only the least fastidious in our tongue could name this an age of supple, or beautiful, or rich, or forceful, or anything but varied and useful styles in English.

If we get little style in English, the text-books teach even less. Good English in their view is first and last clear English, which means English that is plain, unsubtle, direct; it is typewritten English where the meaning jumps to the eye at a glance. Not the infinite complexities of my emotions, nor the baffled struggling of my thought, but what I can readily express in easy sentences neither too long nor too short, is what the rhetorics teach.

They are right to teach thus, for the mind of the young writer is a yeasty mass of unformulated desires and undirected emotions. It surges with aspirations which begin as mighty heavings of the dough and emerge as bursting bubbles. Order, restraint, clarity are steps in a discipline which the most imaginative need most; and failure to mark them would result in floods of wild words. Fortunately undisciplined writers, like clocks without pendulums, soon tick themselves into silence.

Yet the text-books are wrong when they make, as in effect they do make, a sermon on accuracy the sum of good English. Accuracy is enough for the dictator of business letters; for the professional writer it is only the first step. He can be as accurate as a slate roof and as clear as a plate glass window and yet have no more life in him

than a billboard or a declension. He will never develop a style worthy the name unless he struggles with half meanings, gropes in personality, yields to passion, fancy, intuitions, and much else opposed in every way to simple clarity.

There must be two Muses at the elbow of every writer ambitious of the best in English, one to hold back while the other pulls on, one for discipline and the other for expansiveness; one to teach grasp, the other reach; one with a set of principles, the other with a vision of truth, beauty, hope, and unlimited accomplishment.

And if one asks why so many clear and simple books produce so many dull and flat writers, the answer may be that there is too much starching and ironing of poor material. We laugh at the older rhetorics with their talk of the sublime, of the great style, of dignity, of eloquence. But at least the authors of these treatises promised to able writers something more inspiring than unity, coherence, and emphasis. They implied, even if they took no means to secure it, an active intellect, stirred by passionate ideas, and quite as desirous to express itself as to discover how to be obvious to others.

The weakest element in current American literary prose is its style. In the novel, in drama, in poetry, in the essay, whether our work is superior or inferior to the English product, it is usually inferior in this respect. And if Americans lack style it is partly because they have been taught for a generation that good writing is clear writing, which is true, and that clear writing is sure to be excellent writing, which is false. Water, except by the miracle of style, does not become wine.



IV. *Heaven's First Law*

THE literature of the criticism of style is extensive, and there are few professional writers who at one time or another have not had their say upon the universal element of good writing which "may be tested for and identified but not delimited or detached." The very elusiveness of the problem as to what constitutes style is its fascination, and the flexibility of the term in theory and its misuse in practice have led to such conflicting definitions and so much parroting of statement that a graduate seminar would find work for a year in merely finding out what critics believe that they think. W. C. Brownell was one of the few among our critics who illustrated style in his own prose while writing of its subtleties. In one of his last books, "The Genius of Style," he rendered an uncommon service in quoting the definition which Buffon really wished to apply to style instead of that unfortunate phrase which we use in place of thinking, "the style is the man." By the latter Buffon meant no more than that the manner of handling a theme would depend upon the nature of the writer. "Style," says Mr. Brownell, translating his real definition, "is nothing other than the order and movement which we put into our thoughts."

Style, whatever else it may be, is order and movement. Order is not pattern; it is the coördinating thought that creates and holds together the artistic whole. Movement is not speed; it is continuity, it is rhythm continued through subject and mood to association and atmosphere. The true artist is absorbed "in a kind of controlled excitement and directed purpose, endeavoring to embody his ideal of how the subject should be treated as well as in love with the subject itself. . . . In the widest sense, thus, style would

be the art of technic, that element of technical expression which makes an art of what otherwise is at best but skill. . . . It is the spirit of style that transmutes life into art."

For a period like ours such a statement is radical in the extreme. It contains an implication which Mr. Brownell develops ruthlessly, that style is *not* the man in the sense in which Buffon's statement has been misinterpreted. Style itself is impersonal, although personality may be freed through it. That personal imprint of the temperament upon language which the cant phrase denotes as style, is manner, a different and less excellent thing. Less excellent because if not controlled by purposes of harmony, order, beauty, to the furthering of the work, it becomes, as with Dickens, a clogging of expression, as with the sensationalist and experimentalist, a mere discharge of idiosyncrasy not generalized into any significance.

Prose has suffered from the present fashion of saying to the ego, "Do as you please." English prose, the high tradition of which has had since the sixteenth century beauty as an attribute, is, as every one recognizes, now flattened toward utilitarianism. We have gained a clarity and simplicity which make prose useful to science and daily affairs, and are also attributes of good style, but in disdaining any ideal of order and movement belonging to the perfection of expression, though not essential for the utterance of simple thought, we have lost the secret of overtones, reduced our prose to a statement, and infinitely narrowed expressiveness. Emotion and the most elementary explanation of crude fact now have an almost identical medium.

In the plastic and pictorial arts and in the prose of what we prefer to call literature, there have been curiously different results. For there the insistence upon highly personal expression without reference to the representation

of life or the ideal of beauty has resulted in a lack of any personality whatsoever in the resulting style. Our autobiographical novels might all be written by the same hand, neo-impressionist paintings have reduced the expression of the artist himself to abstract curves and cubes, and the craving for personal expression is fed by crude contrast and sensation in the subjects chosen.

It is, apparently, a new influx of the philosophy of Rousseau, an exaltation of the natural man, who is to express himself naturally, which means without restraint, without reference to the purpose or the laws of expression in general. Mr. Brownell finds us childish; he would find, I suspect, "Ulysses" childish in its movement, though mature in its stylistic conception. And his book, beyond its merits as brilliant analysis, is a plea that art must be civilized to be art and to be useful, except as a relief for individual emotions. "The element of style is of too universal a substance and application to be identified with the individuality of whose intelligent expression it is clearly and consciously, even when instinctively, an instrument. . . . And it had certainly much better be an end in itself, subordinating all personality and achieving at least an ordered and rhythmic result, than illustrate the kind of feeling and functioning to be associated in many instances with unconsciousness." Style is that lifting of individual expression into an order and rhythm which both perfects the expression and makes it comprehensible in its entirety by other men. It is a medium for personality, controlled by imagination and prolonged by the continuity of thought. It is not natural any more than speech is natural; it is simple only as the result of simplification; it is beautiful because order and harmonious movement are always beautiful. The definition is my own, but the attempt is to

draw off for my own purposes a concentration of Mr. Brownell's thought.

I have necessarily weakened the attack upon our esthetic dullness, upon the flatness of our prose, upon the discontinuity of our verse, and the excess of manner and lack of comprehensible style in the representative arts, in this brief reporting, but that Mr. Brownell has laid true charges only those ignorant of tradition can doubt. The case is most patent in architecture where, as it happens, we seem most likely to emerge with a new sense of style nobly displayed. The many excrescences and distortions in current naturalism, expressionism, and sensationalism in literature are quite comparable, though half a century behind, to the eclectic, freakish, and uncontrolled egoism of nineteenth century architecture, in which one feels now no sense of personality, though personal whim was paramount, no style, no order, and often no sense.

They are, however, not exactly comparable because of the half-century interval since the peak of bad architectural design, in which the evolution of modern man has by no means stood still. The liberating effects of science, freedom to read, freedom to disbelieve, freedom to move quickly, freedom to speak with all the world at once, are now far more marked. They have given us, it is true, a bourgeoisie in the arts and the intellect of unexampled magnitude, which by mere weight and clamor makes difficult, except in privacy, so fine a quality as style. We want it unknowing, but cannot make and will not foster it. But fitful bursts into artistic sensationalism which Mr. Brownell so rigorously condemns may conceivably be regarded as escapes from the standardized majority and the standardized conventions which this bourgeoisie accepts in place of style. The exasperated individual flings away

from men instead of toward them as the stylist must. He breaks the patterns, he shrieks, he gesticulates, he inverts. He realizes as keenly as Mr. Brownell that the clearness and simplicity of simple souls who make language conform to the mass wants of vanity, food, health, and the amassing of property, are virtues that point the way toward an intolerable decline of the spirit, and therefore he thrusts his own revolting soul upon expression, seeking new harmonies even in ugliness, and salvation in revolt. So doing, he destroys that nice balance of the personal in style which has been so difficult to recapture since the Periclean epoch.

Indeed, we are drunk with movement. Music syncopates; painting and sculpture drop representation to follow planes and curves; newspapers are written in a kind of shorthand, which consists of leaving out everything that is not vivid, so that a "story" becomes a series of sensations, and an editorial one platitude repeated in ten striking different ways. Short stories move so fast that one reads only for movement, and it is credibly reported that devotees of "The Saturday Evening Post" break to the nearest tail-end of a story in the rear section without troubling about continuity if the tempo is swift. Novels have shed their outer garments of description and comment so that they may run.

But what of order? Order has gone into business and is manufacturing efficiency for the world. Order in literature has become a text-book virtue that can be taught in correspondence courses. Order of the I, a, b, c, II, a, b, c, variety is common enough but that more important organization of material which both directs and is the thought, which is the final product of man's imagination in its constructive mood, is not common. Perhaps it never has been common but there have been years when it was far less

rare. Modern painting and modern architecture are searching for order but have not yet found it. The really interesting novels and plays today are too experimental to give an ordered sense of finality. Poetry has tried to do without order in the attempt to escape convention.

But if modern books and modern styles lack order it is not necessarily, as honest Tories maintain, because modern writers have disorderly minds. Nor is it because the story teller prefers a sketchy, unrounded narrative. They are willing to sacrifice order to originality, penetration, vividness, or novelty. Movement, in every sense, is their desire, and since they will if necessary sacrifice order to movement, they will not take the necessary pains (and they are many) which order requires.

There is forever a systole and diastole between these two elements of writing, and probably it is only in rare individuals or in much rarer periods that they integrate in such a sense that it becomes possible to define them as the coöperatives of style. In other times, with other men, they tug at each other, and sometimes order crystallizes into pattern, and sometimes, as now, movement breaks literature into a criss-cross of waves. But even at the moment of relative balance there are divergent purposes leading to different results. The genius who can give order to a new movement is usually an expansionist and romantic, and, together, with the disorderly, may be a rebel and often an outcast in his times. The Racine, or Sophocles, or Pope, or Fielding who can reduce an old movement to a new order without aridity or stultification is a classicist, an intellectual, and in an orderly period is crowned with laurel and showered with gold.

At least this much solace may be promised to those who do not like rapid movement and constant change: they suffer but they will not suffer long. It is the classic periods



that go slowly, with brakes on, down the gentlest of grades. There was so little alteration in English style between, say, 1700 and 1800, that it takes some connoisseurship in the period to note the lapse of time in rhythm or vocabulary. But consider what gulfs divide us from the manner of 1825. Put Hazlitt in the New York "World," Byron in "Poetry: A Magazine of Verse," the young Carlyle in "The American Mercury," De Quincey in "The Pictorial Review," and Thomas Hood in "Life." How they would date themselves! Prose style has changed more rapidly in this country in the last twenty years than in any other period of English since Lyly's day or Dryden's. Bent upon movement, it has moved too fast for order, though order will come.

It is, indeed, inconceivable that fundamental changes in means of sustenance, social relations, education, occupation, and, most of all, in the application of science, both obviously and subtly, to every phase of human life and to many, if not all, aspects of human conduct, can be without their far-reaching effects. Art is eternal, but it is a function of man, and while I do not share the fallacy that when we move at sixty miles an hour and transmit our words across continents, our soul and nature change accordingly, nevertheless I feel that Mr. Brownell has given less thought to underlying changes in conditions which must affect art, and which within the scope of the industrial period on whose margin we stand are likely to be permanent, than to results, perhaps temporary, of the first impacts of change. It is well to be at least tolerant of experiment and to expect discoveries, especially in new approaches to style which may share all the attributes that Mr. Brownell stipulates, and yet be more sharply different from, and more difficult to reconcile with, what we regard as tradition than new departures in the past. Music,

of which he says little, is perhaps now a testing ground of much which, in issue at least, is clearer there than in literature where new thoughts, new subjects, obscure the novelty, or lack of it, in style.

And yet it is even more important to recognize with Mr. Brownell that personality, even original personality, does not and cannot of itself make style, that no utility, no impact upon jaded senses, no new and arresting technique, no inclusions of areas of the human spirit never before expressed in literature, not even the virtues of efficient clarity and simplicity, can of themselves make style, or become durable literature, until by the force of the imagination controlled in the search of order and movement they attain it. That style is an entity to be sought, that it is indispensable for literature, that we have jilted the goddess for our own egos, that life never becomes art until it is ordered and rhythmical—these are the teachings of “The Genius of Style.” Excellent teachings, they are excellently applied and interpreted. One hopes that there is enough discipline left in the anarchic contemporary world of art and criticism which Mr. Brownell deprecates to cope with the pregnancy of his own subtle but perhaps a little too sophisticated style.

### v. *Prose*

MR. HERBERT READ has offered a distinction between prose and poetry which has much relevance to the question of style. Poetry, he says, inheres in the word, or at least in the phrase, itself. This unit of expression—this atom of language—is suffused with imagination, electric with motion. Remove it from its context and it still glows—“magic casements,” “seas incarnadine,” “patines of

bright gold." But prose is a creation of rhythm and therefore of harmony. The complex and irregular pattern in which its words are set is style, is in a true sense prose as differentiated from mere words in syntax. Expressions of low potentiality, words of little color, when ordered by rhythm make the dignity of Milton, the lucid roll of Macaulay, the intricate sophistications of Pater, the eloquence of Emerson.

A definition of a complex abstraction like art, or beauty, or truth, or poetry, or prose, is precisely that they are not completely definable, which means that we must constantly be trying new explanations to determine an aspect or mark a relation between human needs and fact. Thus, one accepts Mr. Read's contribution as valid, as far as it goes.

Yet it is dangerous to define an art solely by its technique. Prose is not by necessity rhythmical because rhythm makes prose. It is rhythmical because something in human nature requires an irregular rhythm to give it tangible existence.

Prose, if you please, is like a wall, and poetry a collection of cut gems. Walls have long engaged the imagination of poets—

Something there is that does not like a wall.

But look at a wall, a rough dry wall, a meandering wall in the wood lot, a shadowed and ivy-grown, fern-bordered wall. It is a collocation of diversities ingeniously if irregularly dovetailed and combined. The foundation is of great iron-stone boulders, the beams and joists are mighty slabs of weathered granite aging into the life of lichen and moss, no two more alike than the days that broke and weathered them. And they are bound and morticed by

broad flakes of gray schist, and packed with milky nodules and broken spears of quartz like cream cheese, or bright fruit in a cake. A block of sparkling hornblende protrudes like a ledge, and where the top has crumbled to let the deer path over, a chunk of mica feldspar dropping apart from green moisture threatens to bring down the wall.

And yet it is a wall: these various stones make a useful and beautiful entity. As long as three stand on each other, they will be not rocks merely but a creation that came from and means something to man. Even where frost has wedged out the boulders and let down the heart and head of the wall in ruin among the dogwoods, there is still a suggestion of order, still the poise and angle of the fallen stones make a continuance, an entity, the wall.

Prose style is like that. The common rocks and stones of intercourse are its elements. They are too familiar, too homely, too knobby alone to be significant, or beautiful, or even expressive. You cannot make poetry of them for they are intrinsically unpoetical, and cannot be shaped to poetry except by a crystallization of some plain reality in them which is lost with change. A fireside conversation, the antics of a dog, the back and forth of an argument, the common sense of explanation or advice—put these into verse and they become rhetoric. Nor are they word by word, phrase by phrase, either memorable or significant.

It is the need of binding together, not the existence of rhythms, that makes prose. And in this way, if in no other, I would carry back Mr. Read's definition into nature, from which, as Emerson says, men organize art.

VI. *Gyring and Gimbling*  
(Or *Lewis Carroll in Paris*)

THE giants in the old fables were often lacking in a sense of proportion, sometimes in a sense of humor, and so are those Titans of English-speaking Paris who experiment in prose, the half mythical James Joyce and that lesser mistress of the prophetic, Gertrude Stein. Joyce we have been able to estimate as a figure of more than common size by his vigorous "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and the powerful technique of "Ulysses," a Gothic cathedral of a book rich in portraits, gargoyles, and grotesques. The conception of "Ulysses" was clearly giant-like, the execution subject to controversy. Its details were praised by some of the discriminating, but by more who delight in art in proportion to its obscurity, and detest the very name of common sense. Gertrude Stein we knew in feats of word legerdemain which had strange powers since some minds were fascinated by her scrambled sentences and others driven to wails and cursings.

Now, thanks to the midwifery of Mr. Elliot Paul, an American resident in Paris, where presumably one can take the English language without too much seriousness, and to the magazine "Transition," we can see Mr. Joyce in his latest work and find Miss Stein "elucidated."

"Ulysses," we are told, was a night book, the new work is a day book and the rivers of Ireland are its heroes. Apparently it, too, is to have scope and plan, not to be judged from the brief extracts so far published. Therefore without prejudice to the scheme of the whole, which may be as impressive as that of "Ulysses," we can study the expression by which this giant of our days proposes to erect his second cathedral. It is not English, although

there is vigor in the sound of it; it is not indeed language by any known tests; nor is it sound merely, since some of it is unsoundable except by Gargantuan lungs. In this fashion does the book begin:

riverrun brings us back to Howth Castle & Environs, Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr' over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North America on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County's gorgios, while they went doublin their mumper all the time; nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeatrick: not yet, though venissoon after, hada kidscad buttended a bland old isaac; not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen rigsome on the waterface.

The fall (badalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonneronntuonnthunntrovarrhounownskawntoohoochoordenenthurnuck!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrlsy. The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the schute of Finnigan, erse solid man, that the humpty-hillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the park where oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since Devlins first loved livy.

What clashes here of wills gen wonts, oystrygods gaggin fishygods! Brékkek Kékkek Kékkek Kékkek! Kóax Kóax Kóax! Úalu Úalu Úalu! Quáouauh! What chance cuddleys, what cashels aired and ventilated! What bidimetoloves sinduced by what tegotetabsolvers! What true feeling for their's hayair with what strawng voice of false jiccup! O here here how hoth sprowled met the duskt the father of fornicationists but, O my shining stars and body! how hath fanespanned most high heaven the skysign of soft advertisement! But waz



iz? Is ent? Ere were sewers? The oaks of ald now they lie in peat yet elms leap where ashes lay. Phall if you but will, rise you must: and none so soon either shall the pharce for the nunce come to a setdown secular phoenish.

This is like those Phi Beta Kappa orations in Latin when one was supposed to laugh, but where? More succeeds—

(Stoop,) if you are abcedminded, to this claybook, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this allaphbed! A terricolous vivelyonview this; queer and it continues to be quaky. A hatch, a celt, an earshare the pourquose of which was to cassay the earthcrust at all of hours, furrowards, bagawards, like yoxen at the turnpath. Here say figurines billycoose arming and mounting. Mounting and arming bellicose figurines see here. Futhorc, this liffle effingee is for a firefing called a flint-forfall. Face at the eased! O I fay! Face at the waist! Ho, you fie! Upwap and dump em, ~~W~~ace to ~~W~~ace! When a part so ptee does duty for the holos we soon grow to use of an all-forabit.

In between is of a like intelligibility. The man has a design, that is certain, for Joyce is a giant, even though myopic; he can write, one feels that, but what has he written? Here at last is the consummation of Browning's "fancies that broke through language and escaped!"

Gertrude Stein comes to the rescue. She is no coward like Joyce's disciples, who explain in perfectly simple English what Joyce means in the whole, while carefully ignoring his incomprehensible parts. Miss Stein is all parts—at least to my limited intelligence. She believes that the sound of words conveys a meaning far more significant than sense, therefore away with sense! Is nonsense sense? Is cents not sense? Is sense non-cents? Joyce agrees, but

adds that the appearance of words has a more esoteric significance than their denotation. Adds, that is, by inference, as the above quotations prove. For a statement of theory one must go to the mother founder of the school, Miss Stein.

"Since unfortunately," says the editor, "the version of Miss Gertrude Stein's 'An Elucidation,' printed in the April number of 'Transition,' while containing the correct words, presented them in the wrong order<sup>1</sup> (through an inadvertence in the printing establishment) the text has been rearranged.<sup>2</sup> In "An Elucidation" Miss Stein "hits upon the happy idea" of illustrating "a technique and artistic conception transcending the kind of writing which consists in a long line of bits of information placed end to end," by a series of examples where she can explain herself in her own terms. Since it may be possible to understand Joyce by comprehending Stein we hasten to be elucidated. Perhaps two of her examples will serve:

#### AN ELUCIDATION

##### Halve Rivers and Harbours

Elucidation.

First as Explanation.

Elucidate the problem of halve.

Halve and have.

Halve Rivers and Harbours,

Have rivers and harbours.

You do see that halve rivers and harbours, halve rivers and harbours, you do see that halve rivers and harbours makes halve rivers and harbours and you do see, you do see that you that you do not have rivers and harbours when you halve

<sup>1</sup> "My God," said my Uncle Toby."

<sup>2</sup> Is it permissible to guess that one of the French printers knew English and followed Nature instead of copy?

rivers and harbours, you do see that you can halve rivers and harbours.

I refuse have rivers and harbours I have refused. I do refuse have rivers and harbours. I receive halve rivers and harbours, I accept halve rivers and harbours.

I have elucidated the pretence of halve rivers and harbours and the acceptation of halve rivers and harbours

This is a new preparation.

Do not share.

He will not bestow.

They can meditate.

I am going to do so.

I have an explanation of this in this way. If we say, Do not share, he will not bestow they can meditate I am going to do so, we have organised an irregular commonplace and we have made excess return to rambling, I always like the use of these, but not particularly.<sup>3</sup>

#### ANOTHER EXPLANATION

I think I won't

I think I will

I think I will

I think I won't

I think I won't

I think I will

I think I will

I think I won't.

I think I won't

I think I will

I think I will

I think I won't

I think I will

I think I won't

I think I will

I think I won't.

I think I will

<sup>3</sup> See first note.

I think I won't

I think I won't

I think I won't

I think I won't

I think I will

I think I won't

Of course

I think I will

I think I won't

I think I won't

I think I will

This is a good example if you do not abuse it.

Where they like.

Can follow where they like.

I think this is a good example.

I think I will.

I am afraid I have been too careful.

I think I will.

Two examples and then an elucidation and a separation of one example from the other one.

I think I will.

Then very certainly we need not repeat.

Can there at this rate can there have been at this rate more and more.

Can at this rate can there have been at this rate can there have been more and more at this rate.

At this rate there can not have been there can not have been at this rate there can not have been more and more at this rate. At this rate there can not have been more and more. There can not have been at this rate, there can not have been more and more at this rate there can not have been more and more at this rate.

What did I say. Full of charms I said.

Full of what. Full of charms I said.

What did I say, full of charms I said.

If in order to see incidentally incidentally I request to see extraordinarily.

If in order to see incidentally I request to see,  
I see you I see you too.

The charm of this phrasing is undeniable. It has the suavity of Lewis Carroll's whiting, "Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?" and the mystic suggestion of that "Aoi" in the "Chanson de Roland" which no one has ever been able to translate. But this is not the language of snails and whittings or of Frankish primitives; it is a tongue of the future when our words will clash like cymbals symbols and mean what they sound like, if you know what that means. We shall translate our thoughts into airy syllables that spell nothing at all.

Many take Miss Stein seriously (she is already a cult) and so will I. This is onslaught and ravage upon the English language which hitherto has been able to combine the highest imagination with sense, common or uncommon. Language was made for men, not men for language, but these Parisian expatriates would turn over the age-old structure in order to get new effects. Lyly, quite as intelligent a genius as Joyce and Stein, tried it in the sixteenth century, powerfully influenced his literary contemporaries, as they have, and with his "Euphues" and his imitators became a by-word. The parallel is not inexact, for "Euphues," like "Ulysses" and this new work by Joyce, is a book of scope and plan, intolerable only in its execution.

The giants are often like that, especially in a period of decadence and affectation. Their obfuscations and great motions never carried through touch the imagination of men weary of the shining lucidities of the gods. They have attempted new things and the wise may learn of them, but for the foolish they are illusion, delusion, and

confusion. When, blundering up the slopes of Olympus, they murmur with Miss Stein—

If in beginning, if in beginning, I begin to be connectedly and carefully and collectedly if I agree, if in beginning I agree, then I agree you agree and we agree—

may Lewis Carroll be there on the ramparts, to take his vorpal sword in hand and smite the frumious Bander-snatches!



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## CRITICISM, THEORETICAL AND APPLIED

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### I

A CRITIC without a program is like modern man without his clothes—healthy, agile, functioning in all his senses, but regarded as less than respectable, even by his friends. Yet what is a program but a reflection of temperament! A sanguine, full-blooded man thinks well of his universe, a melancholy man thinks ill of his, and each makes his program. There is more honest philosophizing in many a casual newspaper column, or blunt plain man's opinion, than in elaborate sets of principles chosen to fit a prevailing mood.

We cannot escape from our moods but we need not capitalize them for the supposed benefit of bored contemporaries. A guiding purpose must be drawn not from the temperament of an individual, but from things as they are in literature.

### II

TO my thinking, one of the most deceptive statements ever uttered is that life is more interesting than literature. Life is only rarely and by moments more interesting than literature; then, I grant, it is engrossing beyond

all imagined experience. Vigorous writing is just an attempt to recapture the flavor and pulsation of such moments. But hour-by-hour living is dull beside good books, badly composed, badly selected, unrevealing. It is a fair question whether the shop girl going to work in the morning does not get more sensations of actual life from the book she is reading than through all the rest of her usual day. Men and women who do not find good books interesting are either too dull or too vivid. Either their imaginations cannot be kindled, or their real life is too intense to permit them even for a moment to step out of it.

That is why literature is one of the great subjects, and, like all great subjects, to be taken with both good humor and utmost seriousness, to be loved and made fun of, to be pondered and fought for—

How charming is divine Philosophy!

Not harsh, and crabbed, as dull fools suppose.

The modern fashion, however, does not regard literature—or at least contemporary literature—as a harsh and crabbed female, but rather as a much advertised show girl, bought and paid for, and to be written about at so much a word. A great topic cannot be so approached. In the hearts of those who assess good writing as if it were pig iron or ladies' hose, good humor and sympathy are dead as soon as born. No affectation of wit or enthusiasm can take their place.

A critic of literature must be aware of his good fortune and unblushingly embrace his subject, leaving reticence and prejudice behind. The half-hearted intellectual afraid of his enthusiasm, is as much of a charge upon criticism as the entranced sentimentalist. One suffers from too little love to give and the other from too little sense in loving.

But in pursuing literature, a critic must be aware of two functions of literature that, so far as I am aware, have not been clearly distinguished in their modern aspects, although the general difference has been the cause of many a lively row. Literature can be timeless and literature can be timely.

There is a saving quality in the great authors which in every age has been a solace for the fine spirit lurking in man's complex of mechanism and mystery. Most of the superlatives applied by philosophic critics to good books refer to this essential quality of the great art of literature. It heartened Cicero when Caesar burst into Italy so roughly; exalted Milton in his blindness; came to many plain men in the King James version; kept Shelley afloat upon a sea of sex (and he drowned in its company); has been known to subdue even the growing pains of the undergraduate. I write lightly of what I in common with a multitude of others believe to be, like religion and hope, one of the few necessities men do not share with beasts. In a generation where size seems hopelessly confused with excellence, and civilization is written in terms of the advertising pages, the spiritual reserve in great books may not need defending, but must be constantly sought out and interpreted.

Every teacher and editor and scholar from Plato down has been a prophet of the religion of literature, until essayists and other preachers have come to praise books only because they can raise and solace the bedraggled soul. Yet this literature of the spirit to which belong mighty musings from the past, and recollected beauty, and all that deals with man not here and now but in his eternal aspects, whether as Prometheus or Falstaff, all this is a literature of retreat. Those who enjoy it are for the moment old. The drums have sounded for them; they have

left the streets, left the battle, stepped out of the immediacies of life, are looking on, not into, experience. Now they understand, now they appreciate, now they think of race and family, love and truth, romance and beauty, all the attributes which we see in living only when we have time to meditate upon them.

Indeed a mild pessimism is necessary if literature in these classic aspects is to yield its best. The reader must be no Faust, but willing to leave the moment because memory is more fair. The dreamer has realized his incapacity, the vigorous have become weary, the efficient have learned a passive resignation before they read best in this aspect of literature. Good books in their eternal function are entrances into the life of the spirit, but they are also slow swinging doors leading from crowded corridors into seclusion.

It takes more than good reporting and skilled technique to make literature of this quality. We have had it in our century and a half of American literature—not often, but in greater proportion than has been supposed. Home-grown thought has advantages which sometimes compensate for other merits. Thoreau and Whitman knew more than Carlyle and Tennyson of the antidotes for *hysteria Americana*.

So much for the timeless literature of retreat, books in their noblest function of self-heal and illumination. But neither readers nor critics can live on mountain tops or in cloisters. New York keeps growing in despite of wise maxims in Plato's "Republic," and "Macbeth" and "Lear" stay true but remote, while the struggle for a million and blatant egoism involve the living. Every book, whatever its potentiality of lasting wisdom, exists in its own social complex and helps to explain it. Therefore, to search for eternal values only in literature and to disregard the rest,

is inhuman and a little ridiculous, like trying to understand all ages without experiencing one's own. Good new books especially, whether they contain great art or little, are news of human nature as it is at the moment. We do not read a new book because we think it will live, we read it because it is alive—if it lives, it is because there was life enough to endure the change of seasons, but that is not our only, not even our chief concern, which is with today, not tomorrow. To paraphrase—

If it be not good for me  
What care I how good it be.

This is the timely view of literature, and vigorous critics and active-minded readers cannot escape it, even by trying.

For an illustration, consider the literary aspects of this country, sprawling in its greatness. Just after the Revolution, the so-called Hartford wits, who should have been called the Yale Literati, celebrated in pompous heroics the leadership of the new United States. Freedom and Liberty and Opportunity and a half dozen other capitalizations were to conduct Europe and the World into a god-like Future, where man was to realize his glorious Destiny under a Universal Republic. No one writes that way now except in the bunkum of inferior statesmen. Nevertheless, the United States has become after all a model for the world—and I do not mean in virtue, wealth, kind of government, or mold of character. In the United States, that form of society which we still call democratic for want of a juster word, has reached its fullest development, and every civilized country is year by year borrowing, adapting, self-developing, with an equivalent society as an end almost in sight. England has Americanized in this sense almost unbelievably since 1900.

Of course, it is not properly speaking an Americanization, it is the results of the industrial revolution working out into a changed life for every individual. Politics are secondary; pure democracy is no nearer than before; but mass production, mass knowledge, mass communication have produced a society where every man can move, eat, read, hear with all the power that results, although wisdom is just as hard to attain as ever, and self-control much harder. A vulgar society of great energy, flexible, hysterical, confused, is the outcome: a society of infinite possibilities for slow good, or rapid evil. If you are optimistic you call it the emancipation of the common man; if pessimistic, you may quote Polybius on Rome—

The violent influx of prosperity will produce a more extravagant standard of living and an excessively keen competition between individuals. . . . As these tendencies develop, a process of deterioration will be initiated. . . . When they are inspired by a sense of injustice, by the material greed of some of their masters, and with a false conceit by the insincerity of others in pursuit of a political career, . . . the masses become so intensely exasperated and so completely guided by passion that they repudiate all subordination to or even equality with the upper classes and identify the interests of the community with their own. When this point is reached the commonwealth acquires the flattering appellations of Liberty and Democracy, while it is subject to the appalling reality of the "despotism of the crowd."

And this society, for evident reasons, developed first and most fully in America. We alone had broken through our conventions to go pioneering in a strange environment; we alone had boundless physical opportunities open for a while to all; we alone had a political and social system with small resistance to mass control; we alone



through immigration have a cosmopolitan population bound by no single tradition but the American, which is liberal and elastic to an extreme.

I am neither praising the American mass civilization nor condemning it. Nor do I mean that, having studied its blare and bustle, one knows all, or even the most important, facts about the United States. My single point is that here is a type of civilization of obvious importance and therefore obvious interest, and that literature must and will report it. I say report it; literature will try to make art of it also, and may succeed, is certainly in some measure already succeeding. But we Americans who read, and we who edit, cannot remain indifferent to the mere reporting. Every attempt to present it in history, sociology, psychology, biology, as well as in pure literature, or pure comedy, must be interesting, must be for a critic as vital as the enduring values of literature.

This literature in its aspect of timeliness is active, not passive, which does not mean that it is better or truer than timeless literature but rather the reverse. It is a literature of men whose drums are still beating onward; it reports the turmoil, not meditation; admixture, not refinement; expectation, not memory; what is momentarily apparent rather than what is necessarily true. Not to read it is not to live now, however much one may dip into essential life. In extremes, the contrast is between the newspapers, the comic strips, the movies, against Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton. But the means differ only as between today and yesterday—Ring Lardner, Hergesheimer, Robert Frost versus Cooper, Irving, Hawthorne; or between history in literature and literature as art—Sinclair Lewis and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

I shall drop then in conclusion those somewhat formal terms, timeless and timely, and say that criticism, which is

part of the living fabric of contemporary literature, must be keenly aware of both past and present, and a partisan of both. It must be like a modern university where one seeks principles, but also works in laboratories of immediate experience amidst the vivid confusion of experiment. In one guise a graybeard philosopher searching for the Best, but also in the mood of youth watching the three-ringed show under the great tent of Today—and discriminating in both—that is the double function of a critic.

### III

IT was too much to expect that literary criticism would escape from the increasing complexity of civilization. Like religion, like politics, like human behavior, it is meshed in machines, entangled with democracy, regimented by science, exploited by journalism. Once practised as an art by connoisseurs, and as pure logic by intellectuals, it has been handed down, like theology, to the crowd, and, like theology again, it has lost its principles while keeping its discords. Even the word criticism has become as worn and as empty as an old tire in a ditch. It fits anything and everything and means whatever is put into it. No two talkers ever mean the same thing when they discuss criticism, and writers are little better. Mr. Chesterton thinks of criticism as a search for God in literature, Mr. Woollcott and Mr. Heywood Brown test a play by its effect on their own experienced emotions, Mr. I. A. Richards puts a book into a psychologist's laboratory, Professor Phelps regards it as a source for enthusiasms. Sometimes literature is praised for being witty itself and sometimes it becomes merely a cause of wittiness in others. Wherever you find a critic, a typewriter, a pile of books,

and a vocabulary, there is sure to be another, but by no means a new, idea of criticism.

There is no use discussing literary criticism and how to use it, no matter how informal the approach, unless we can put back some meaning into the stretched and empty word. As long as the journalists bawl at the scholars, You may be critics but you don't know literature, while the scholars sneer back, You may be literary but you are certainly not critics, we get chiefly noise.

Begin, then, not with the nature of true criticism, as all theorists love to do, but with confusion itself, the muddle sure to result when many purposes are called by one name.

For literary criticism is no longer a single purpose, it is a kind of writing, a mode of expression, a *genre* like the novel. And it is looser and wider even than the novel, which has now become another stretched term that covers anything from a fairy tale retold for Broadway to a sociological treatise lumbering heavily over awkward rollers of narrative. In the novel such discrepant achievements as Dreiser's "American Tragedy," Virginia Woolf's acrobatics on a sixpence, and the popular tale of crime represent widely different purposes, all using narrative, but only as a means. And so it is with criticism. The critic may be seeking truth, or he may be trying to give the public what it wants. (The public does not often want truth, but then neither does the critic.) Between these extremes there is a wide range of useful compromise and special purpose, and at either end is the very considerable difficulty of determining which of many ways of seeking truth will yield it and the equally difficult problem of knowing what the public does want before it has ceased wanting it. Arranged in this order, viewed as a method of expression used as one pleases, criticism has a very different aspect from that familiar in the text-books.

Draw a curve of interest to represent the various critical attitudes. At one end of this curve the critic, usually a scholar, an esthete, or a scientist, is obsessed by the qualities of literature itself. He wants to know (as Professor Lowes does, for instance) the sources of the creative imagination, he wishes to analyze the factors of beauty, he desires to interpret the purposes of the author, conscious or unconscious, he must find some absolute of excellence, some relative of merit, by which his discoveries may be measured or classified. His duty is to the book and the book's author. But as the curve mounts into the world of men a new principle enters, the audience. Critics become aware of a pressing need for explanation. They perceive a double duty—to interpret the book and to pass on the interpretations. Their criticism is not ended when they have “settled *hoti's* business,” they must feed with the subtle juices of art extracted from masterpieces the presumably thirsty public. The critic becomes teacher.

And with the next arc of the curve the focus of interest again changes. The critic, now usually a journalist, has become a conveyor of news. He is a writer before he is a critic, and his first duty is to interest his readers. His subject matter is a book (or drama, or music, or art), not crime, politics, or finance, but his obligation to inform and excite and amuse is as great as if he were writing human interest stories for a very human audience. He has become an entertainer, and his subject, literature, is valuable to him only in so far as he can make it valuable to his readers.

All along the line of this curve the usual restrictions and definitions of literary criticism apply, and its use as a convenient figure implies no praise for the seeker of absolute truth or blame for the professional entertainer. In practice, the scholar devoted to truth often sticks his head

into a swamp of facts and performs a less service for criticism than some haphazard journalist who uses his powerful intuitions solely to interest and amuse. In practice, the columnist or the casual reviewer may prepare for his task by the most elaborate analysis, may devotedly search for the truth before he prepares his pill for a public that will take anything, even truth, if it is properly sweetened.

It is a fact, not a principle that is being described, but it is the first fact to consider in a discussion of modern criticism. Grant, then, the curve of interest and all that must accompany it, and note further and finally that under the conditions in which we today live and think, this curve, like a ray of light, is subject to the gravitational pull of strong spheres of influence. At the end of the curve where, whether impressionist or scholar, the critic studies a book for its own sake, the pull of modern experimental science is strong, a method of thinking, a repository of ascertained facts, which warps the curve of interest away from the older line of esthetics toward psychology, sociology, pathology, history. At the other end, where the audience becomes the chief factor, modern journalism, with its emphasis upon sensation, upon the interests of mediocre men, and upon immediate utility rather than possible good, exercises its incalculable and almost irresistible influence.

Diametrically different as seemingly these influences are, they are yet, as we shall see, sprung from the loins of the same age, are blood relatives if not twins, and the critic and criticism can escape one or the other, but never both.

## IV

IT is, as I have suggested above, the dominating interest of the writer that has always determined the nature of his criticism. He can no more escape from his age than the preacher, the soldier, or the philosopher. That passionate excitement over the classics which now seems a little absurd to us in the books of the Renaissance, was inevitable in a civilization remaking a world that had not been urbane and sophisticated since the decline of Rome. Horace and Aristotle were more than names, they were symbols. Moral philosophy, which was the great subject of the eighteenth century, controls and directs the literary criticism of the age from Addison to Dr. Johnson. Even profligates and atheists pick up their books by the moral ear and are not content until they have reduced them to moral values.

We eclectic moderns are not so eclectic as we seem. The serious critic, who foreswears journalism, scorns to play up to the immediate interests of the reader, and searches only for Truth, is not so free as he thinks. He may escape from the tyranny of the mass mind if he is content to write for the few, but he cannot escape the subtle influences of his period, except by sticking his head in the sands of an earlier century. Like our architects, he must work with steel and industrialism, or produce *pastiches*, lovely and erudite perhaps, but neither vital nor significant.

The serious criticism of the twentieth century is dominated by experimental science. This does not mean that our criticism has to be scientific in the laboratory sense in order to be right; it means that where criticism is alive and vigorous in our day, it is as inevitably attracted toward



scientific thinking as the iron filing toward the electro-magnet.

The science that obsesses the literary man has varied from decade to decade. In the 'seventies it was biology, and from about that date flowed into criticism all those ideas of evolutionary processes in literary forms which now are so familiar that we speak of the *growth* of the short story or the *development* of the drama with no idea that other ages never associated growth in its biological sense with the expressions of art. In the early twentieth century, psychology displaced biology as the literary magnet; and when in our day psychology began to concern itself with the nature of the personality and the causes of human behavior, the new psychology drove out the old in literary circles even while the scientists themselves were still in drawn battle. It is, indeed, the strength and appositeness of a scientific theory, not necessarily its truth, that gives it attractiveness for criticism. The critic is looking for help in his problems of analysis and synthesis. Give him a tool that is useful and he will not inquire too curiously as to how it is made. And he is usually right. Both novelists and critics accepted far too readily a theory of the universality of the evolutionary principle as Herbert Spencer explained it. The biology of their books was often unsound. But the new viewpoint enabled them to learn new things about literature. Overemphasis had the effect of a magnifying glass. They were wrong when, like Zola, they thought they were writing science, but they profited in insight. The same is true of the contemporary popularity of complexes, fixations, and the like. Knotty human nature, approached with these formidable instruments, has yielded fresh fruit. Behaviorism, which as a scientific theory is still dubious, and likely to become more so, as a scientific technique, a method of experiment, has

already given most interesting information as to the actions and motives of the mind. In criticism also it is revealing. One does not have to accept the behaviorist philosophy in order to restudy "Tom Jones" in the light of what has been learned of the springs of human action from the behaviorists' experiments.

It is not therefore the accuracy of scientific theory in literary criticism but its dominance in our period which we discuss here. Let the question of truth wait while we point out a fact. It will be found that every constructive critic of seminal influence in our day, whether de Gourmont or Paul Valéry, Croce, I. A. Richards, or the late Stuart P. Sherman, has related himself in vital fashion to modern science—has advocated a psychological, or social, or anthropological, or ethnological, or biological, or economic view of literature, which amounts to reconsidering literature from new angles. This is the reason why pure esthetic criticism—the study and pursuit of the beautiful—has languished. Esthetics is but just coming under scientific scrutiny. It has been left till now a study in absolutes not involved in the new questions of man's senses and their real nature. We have been investigating races, classes, economic influences, primitive inheritances, neuroses, and the flux of matter—not the beautiful; and our criticism has followed the scientists because our critics, being their fellow men, have had the same interests.

The dangers of this pursuit of science—caught often by one leg only—and sometimes, like the lizard, by a tail from which the life blood has already departed, are less obvious than its solid returns.

But no matter how strong the scientific obsession of our critical age, it cannot and will not turn criticism into a science—will not, that is, unless science succeeds in reducing the whole of the human problem to weight and

measure, a conclusion which grows less likely year by year. For the curve of modern science seems to stretch toward a reduction of the universe to simple forces remotely and inexplicably caused, which, in infinite complication, make the world. And such parts of this complication as personality, esthetics, the moral values, the philosophy of life, seem likely to require metaphysics or an artistic interpretation in order to become comprehensible. Science will provide new tools for thinking, but the imagination must use them.

However that may be, it is clear that the science of criticism is not yet, and probably never will be, the same as criticism. It is an invaluable aid to the understanding of literature, less valuable in painting and music, but the best it can do is to make the critic ready for the effort of intuition and interpretation where his mind springs ahead of the measurable into what can only be felt and divined. Scientifically we are better able to cope with the nature and causes of Shakespeare's genius than any previous age. We know more of his theater than any critics since his time, know more of the Renaissance mind and Renaissance history in general terms than he did, know more of the reason for the subtle effects of language, know better the biology and psychology of his characters than any one before us. The facts about Shakespeare are largely now in our possession; but in intuitive perception of the nature of his genius we have not gone ahead of Coleridge. We are better informed than he, but not better critics. Our foundations are broader and sounder, but our findings do not yet evince his imagination. Probably the job of this generation of critics is with foundations, and we should applaud the attempt to get all the science possible into criticism, and get it right. Unfortunately it is often wrong.

## V

There are more things in heaven and earth . . .

IN the heroic romance the hero judges his opponent by his eyes. If they flinch he will flinch. If they grow tender, so will he. Books are like that also. Judge them by what has happened to the author; and then by what happens to the reader when he reads.

A good book shows that some chemical change in the writer has preceded the writing. He has been excited, he has been moved, he has been angered, he has been amused, he has been touched, he has been depressed, or he has been exalted. A crude test of a book's excellence is the state of the author before and after composing. A mind's pressure has been raised and then discharged. What is the difference in tension worth? If this is crude, it is not because it is a difficult test to apply. To discover why a book has been written, or to measure the discharge of emotions, great or little, is not difficult. The hard thing is to distinguish between gusty explosions of cheap gases and the quiet intensity of high temperatures—between the staccato emotions of melodrama, underlined, relayed, megaphoned, and the power of sharp irony or the quiet of the really tragic. Temperature is a bad figure to use in writing of literature. Light is a better one, for the best light is light without undue heat.

And here, to return to the value of science in criticism, is something new in an old art. The science of criticism, until the eighteenth century, was rhetoric, but rhetoric concerns itself chiefly with literary effects not literary causes; it is the reader not the writer who is analyzed.

When, in the Augustan age, critics became moral philosophers, the mind of the writer began to be actively discussed. His philosophy, his ethics, his prejudices were somewhat tediously dissected by all the eighteenth century critics. Tediously, because usually they did not care so much for what the writer was and felt as whether he conformed to Homer's principles or God's as the deist knew Him. Thus Addison on Milton, and Pope on his enemies and friends.

But experimental science has given critics a new weapon and a new point of view—also new opportunities to make fools of themselves. The mysterious change in potential before a good book begins to be written, the state of the swan before the golden egg was laid, begins to seem less mysterious. There are psychological tests for the emotions and psychological names for mind states which define even when they do not explain. Opium and alcohol are betrayed in the choice of words, realism is sometimes a complex, fearful imagination may be a form of paranoia, and mediocrity a matter of inhibition.

The economists, too, have begun to scrutinize the writer. They explain his liberal passions by the rise of a new industrial class, expound his interest in very common men in terms of democracy, explain the change in his attitude toward woman by her economic emancipation. Criticism of Dickens, George Eliot, Mark Twain, Henry James, Hardy, Masfield is shot through with economics, sociology, or psychology.

In short, thanks to the new sciences, what happens to the writer of a good book has become an important question because new and interesting answers are ready. Rhetoric has given place to a kind of psycho-analysis.

By this new method of critical analysis far more concrete results are arrived at than by the Sublime, the

Ridiculous, the Meritorious, and the Moral of the earlier critics. That is the danger of the process. Write a book to prove that Poe was frustrate, Tennyson a portomaniac, Hawthorne a suppressed sexualist, etc., etc., and you have given your public facts they can readily understand. The pathology of drugs or the behavior of abnormal individuals is much more comprehensible than esthetics. Unfortunately there is a false simplicity in scientific theories applied by men not themselves scientists which must irritate real scientists as it certainly depresses readers of strong literary feeling. Some one discovers that psychologically the sexes merge gradually one into the other, and that those born in this marginal physiology have certain definite reactions to their environment. Quick, says the new critic, rummage through literature to find evidence of homosexuality, and when you have found it throw a flood of light on literary problems never before solved. Light, yes, provided that the theory is correctly understood, and the evidence is sound, but light on only a corner of a corner of literary genius. A psychological peculiarity may explain all of a monicule but only part of a man.

And yet to the first great question of criticism, the nature of the author's mind at the moment of delivery, science has given some such interesting answers that we have all leaned expectantly in that direction and let equally important questions go without answer at all. Tell me what the man is and I'll tell you what his book is, reverses Buffon's proposal to place the man by the style he chose to write in. The first has the spotlight just now in criticism, and a psychological study of a great man of letters has ten times as many readers as a venture in esthetics. By 1950 we shall probably have a new and far clearer conception of the physics and chemistry of that human machine which conditions authorship. Yet now



only one question is being effectively answered and that is in part, as if one should say, Why did the man fail? and be answered, Because he was drunk. But why was he drunk, and does success come from not being drunken? Criticism cannot stop with psychology.

## VI

We asked for bread—

TALK of plots and characters, themes and ideas, new technique and old, is useful enough but seldom touches the heart of literary criticism. Of course we read for information and must be truly informed, and we read for amusement and must be competently diverted, but that hardly raises the question of literary satisfaction! A story is more than a plot, forgotten by next week; a poem is more than an idea, which a radio could supply? Readers think they carry away from books such facts as boys pour out on examination papers—a collection of miscellaneous junk floating on the mind's mill-dam soon to go over the crest—but surely what a good reader essentially acquires from literature is not that, nor does it resemble the analysis and description which we call a review. If "Pickwick" were only the adventures of Mr. Pickwick and "As You Like It" the pastoral story of Rosalind and "Rouge et Noir" Stendhal's idea of the love affairs of a tutor, then the best books would be the most circumstantial, with the most facts in them.

It is excessively difficult to say what a good reader most poignantly gets from a good book, but one real return from an ardent perusal is a confident assurance against change. It is the thrill of recognition that determines good

reading. One chapter of a novel, one paragraph of history, one line of a poem, may intensify self by extending it. Those loveliest eighteenth century lines in Collins's "Ode to Evening"—

And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all  
 Thy dewy fingers draw  
 The gradual dusky veil—

are evening articulate and eternal. It is not the play of "Antony and Cleopatra" that one remembers, but a scene, a line, a voiced emotion—that is the play for him. Stories live in the mind by the warmth of a moment when the book lifts the reader to a recognized experience—everything else is mechanical recollection. Those much ridiculed hungry ones who ask at a library desk for the book where the mother was bitten by a snake, are better readers than the reviewers—they know a book's climax if not what it is about. If that which is really yours in your library should be detached by strong magnetic love from the shelves, there would be a storm of paper fragments—only the best books would yield more than a page or two. The mind keeps perfunctorily far more of literature than is literary for the individual in any real sense. No one has ever published an anthology of Living Moments in Literature, for no one can make one except for himself, and not for himself if he knows too much conventionally of what could be got or ought to be got from books.

Apparently what we unconsciously seek in literature is some conviction of the humanity of man. Bergson, in his famous essay, tried to prove that laughter was engendered by the mechanical actions of a being not intended to be a machine. His definition of humor was too narrow, but by extending it one gets a satisfying insight into the nature of literature. We are mechanical, of course,

in most of our relations, mechanical in conventional love, mechanical in the dull routine of dull living, mechanical when accepting a round of days in repetitive experience. That machine our brain and that machine our body are always threatening to equate man with the true machines which act by simple cause to simple effect. Against this horror of machine life sinking away from emotion, away from hope into drabness where men and women react in a haze of dullness, like oxen plowing, wheels turning, tools rising and falling, mankind has always struggled. It is the eternal human problem, so vast and undramatic that few speak of it, fewer write of it. Old age used to be heavy with such threats. The industrial era has new methods of mechanizing men and women down to their souls. If hell is to be conceived of in modern terms, this will be it.

And therefore the enduring solace of literature is its humanity. The ass of Apuleius frisking his tail while he eats rose leaves is a guarantee of puckishness over two thousand years. That chapter in which Gargantua lives a typical day so full of laughter, wine, kissing, games, and repartee that mechanic dullness is pushed back into the incredible, is a cocktail to the imagination. The hard wit of Molière, those sudden bursts of Shakespeare where beauty rises dizzily, that naughty twinkle of Voltaire's French, Rousseau's bombast suddenly capturing a truth of the world, Wordsworth, when his lines take on serenity and the notes ring like silver bells—these assure the human, the personal in continuity, and are persuasive because to feel humanity is to be human, not a machine. And that is an essence of literature, perhaps the essence. How skilfully does the impressive competence of so many modern books, with their careful fabrics of romantic story, or their psycho-physiologic analyses of sophisticated

sophisms, miss it altogether. Of course we like to be told about Main Street, Park Avenue, the erotic personality, the true character of Washington, how to be a President, the doings of all the bad little girls and boys—but *that is not literature*. What is human, timeless, not merely real but ourselves interpreted and illumined by words which are themselves emotion, that is what we crave, and until we get it we will never be satisfied with the name of literature.

## VII

ONE of the common complaints against this slipshod generation is that it has no standards. We follow, say the old men and some of the young ones, our own wills, which are not always sweet, and please our own tastes, which are often degraded. The charge should be amended. Not a lack of standards but a confusion of standards is our undoing. Literary criticism has become polytheistic and we worship at so many altars that we cannot ourselves name our literary religion.

A great advantage of a classical education was that a cultivated reader always knew where he was in literature. Observe Dr. Johnson at work with Boswell. If his native common sense does not at once solve the difficulty, he falls back upon the ancients. They settle the rightness or wrongness of a current example, usually in a neat quotation. That England was not Augustan Rome and that English was a language of an original genius remained unfortunately true, and such implicit reliance upon a stable literature produced the funeral wreaths of dead rhetoric with which so much English literature from Shakespeare to Tennyson is decked. Nevertheless, the classic practice represented a definite criticism which in

the hands of men of taste made the vulgar impossible and gave a decorum and, in fortunate instances, a nobility to literary expression. Spontaneity was checked but we were spared the literature of gum chewing and the servility of so-called democratic art.

This age is too confident in its strength to accept again the dominance of an alien literature, although when the flurry of industrialism is past it may go back again to Greece and Rome for counsel. It must seek its own standards, and these are obscured by the necessities of a century in which progress in some directions and change in all make an accepted law of life. A standard of excellence in literature implies a criterion of beauty, a principle of ethics, an attitude in philosophy, and there can be no final judgment without due consideration of these fundamentals. But fiction, poetry, drama, essay are all representational, and reflect the change in a complex civilization growing like a culture of variable bacteria in the fertile medium of a biologist's experiment.

It may be said that at such a moment pure esthetic criticism, which attempts to assess in terms of absolute values, is impossible, so urgent will be the desire to relate literature to the social activity which it reflects, so cloudy with topical reference and immediate interest will be the books to be criticized. There is some truth here; but the critic should be able to isolate permanent artistic merits and reach approximate results. What he cannot do is to estimate the quality of beauty without understanding the components of that beauty, and these in periods of rapid change are entangled in the change itself. One must, for example, understand the American as environment is making him before it is possible to estimate with any finality the art into which he enters. Our books are representations of social change made into art, and the two

phases are interdependent. Much of the criticism of "Babbitt" was futile because it discussed that novel either as sheer art of fiction or as American sociology, whereas it was both, with the success in one aspect conditioned by its excellence in the other.

With a growing realization that American literature may be as important for its American as for its literary qualities and a sound belief that it must be both ways regarded, it is not surprising that so much American criticism has been quite as much sociological as literary. There is nothing to regret in this. The nature of vigorous criticism will always be determined by the qualities of the literature to be criticized. Yet when the critic leaves the high realm of pure beauty or the workshop of the craftsman's technique for sociology, ethnology, psychology, and all the other aspects of changing humanity, he begins to worship at a dozen shrines of excellence erected to contending gods. On Monday he may damn a novel for being bad history, on Tuesday condemn a satire for lack of beauty, on Wednesday exalt a dull drama for its faithful picture of pioneer life.

This is the cause of our wobbling judgments, but we can never cure opinion by denying the noisy world that makes decision difficult, and still less by throwing estheticism overboard. Let us, for the moment, condemn no criticism that is useful, and praise none that does not make possible an estimate of services rendered either to wisdom or to the emotional pleasures engendered by art. Change is already speeding past its illusions and clearer skies are ahead.



## VIII

**B**UT let us pray to be delivered from the merely clever. The story of John Keats's manful facing of his impudent and scurrilous reviewers has never been better told than by Miss Lowell in her "Life" of the poet. Her caustic pen scratches out for good and all the once familiar picture of a gentle spirit killed by cruelty, and turns upon Wilson, Lockhart, and Croker with satisfying vehemence. It is the hard insolence of Lockhart's youth that she particularly excoriates—youth sold to the need to be brilliant regardless of justice, and wrapped in snobbish intolerance.

In our day we have escaped from political reviewing; and in this country, at least, slashing criticism inspired by angry prejudice and barbed with sneer and innuendo has gone out of fashion. Scurrility in America comes not from pedants like Croker or intellectual snobs of the Lockhart brand; it is more likely to spring from left-handed attempts at publicity or from the vanity of the immature seeking gratification in smartness. When criticism takes a jazz tempo it is offensive but harmless.

Perhaps dislike of violence has carried us too far. The milk of contemporary criticism is entirely too sweet; those healthy acid bacteria that improve authorship have no chance to develop. In the attempt to find some good in everything, and hurt no one's feelings, what might be called the negative encouragement of a slap on the part most needing chastisement does not get inflicted, and many a writer of brilliant promise reaches fatuous self-satisfaction without being told with force and conviction that, in spite of popular success or the esteem of the literary, he is a failure professionally until he turns promise into achievement. There are only a half-dozen novel-

ists, and about the same number of poets and playwrights, now practicing in this country who, from a professional standpoint, have really mastered the art of writing. In Great Britain, where the amount of talent is no greater, if so great, the curve of professional achievement runs a little higher.

Too much reviewing is done with one eye on the publisher and the other on the supposed desire of the reader to be told only pleasant things. Such reviewing is not only futile as criticism but mistaken in its aim. If the reader has intelligence enough to read a book, he craves assistance in discriminating between the goods and the bads that mingle in all works of art. Appreciation worth anything requires its foil of depreciation. If you do not know diffuseness when you see it, how can you savor conciseness? If to your tolerant taste no difference exists between sentiment and sentimentality, there is no use talking to you of truth. The motto for too much American reviewing is Matthew Arnold's "sweetness and light"—minus the light.

The dominant influence of science is responsible for the modern attempt to be dispassionate in analysis and just in criticism. Democracy has taught respect for capability wherever found. To sneer at a poet for being an apothecary would nowadays seem, as well as be, irrelevant. But science in its insistence upon fact (the so-called news of books) has blurred the final aim of criticism, which is to ascertain not usefulness but achievement. It has made us careless of the value of reading if only the book is readable. We have been better at assessing books of fact than books of imagination.

And democracy has given us an unhealthy tolerance for all honest effort, as if every egg should be praised because some day, some how, it might produce a chick.

"The humanity of the United States can never reach the sublime," wrote John Keats in a letter also quoted by Miss Lowell. He knew next to nothing of the United States, but his poet's instinct made him feel the danger to art of standards erected by the crowd.

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## COMMENT ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS

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### I. *The Feminine Touch in Literature*

FOR a brief period of a century or so in France and England, when Mrs. Montagu, Hannah More, Mme. de Sévigné, Mme. de Staël, and all the other light and dark blue stockings were queening it from their salons, it seemed that women might some day dominate literature. The romantic movement sent them back to languish and sentiment, and the Napoleonic wars made them breeders of children and playthings of men. But their day has come again, and especially in fiction.

The historian of literature no longer writes a section on the women novelists at the end of a chapter; they appear with little reference to sex in the first pages. Jane Austen in her day was a phenomenon, and George Eliot was properly regarded as a portent, but now the proportion of women novelists is nearly as great as the proportion of novel readers who are women. This in itself means very little for literature. It is just one phase of the economic pressure which the modern female has directed upon livelihood. But that so many of the good novelists are women, that so many of the very best, especially in America, are women, is really significant. Name the leading novelists who have come to the front in England since

Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, and you will find in any probable list that at least a third are women. Sheila Kaye-Smith, Virginia Woolf, May Sinclair (in her later phase), Rebecca West, Margaret Kennedy, G. B. Stern will be among them. Name the leading novelists in America for the last fifteen years, and reduce your list to ten. Even so, Willa Cather and Edith Wharton will have to remain, and Zona Gale, Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Edna Ferber, Gertrude Atherton, Elinor Wylie, and others will resist exclusion. In no earlier age has the imagination of women functioned so actively in those life stories which are told of us and for us and become the mirrors in which we see ourselves. The Elizabethans looked through a man's eyes; we moderns have at least an even chance of seeing ourselves as women conceive us.

This does not exhaust the feminist opportunity. The male among artists is very likely to be of that Ionian type where feminine qualities are mingled with the masculine. Biologically and psychologically he is often an intermediate sex, and indeed gains his power as artist by an admixture of feminine sensitiveness. Among male artists of note many will speak for women as well as for men.

And whether an artist is unqualifiedly male, or a mingling of the best qualities of both sexes, literary history shows that he will often spend his best energies upon the women characters, or give them at least as broad a consideration as his men. Richardson's great creation is *Clarissa Harlowe*, with *Pamela* for his second string. Fielding's *Amelia* and his *Sophia Western* yield only to *Tom Jones*. Scott's *Effie Dean* is by many considered his best character. Hawthorne's *Hester Prynne* stands alone. Thackeray's *Beatrix* ranks after *Colonel Newcombe*, Meredith's women are better than his men, Hardy's reputation was made by *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and there

is John Erskine's Helen. I do not wish to over-argue the case. It is sufficient to show that women have always had genius lavished upon them, even when men have written their stories. But have men been so fortunate when women were the novelists?

Jane Austen and George Eliot, it must be admitted, pass the test, although no one, I think, would deny that their women are richer, stronger, more human than their men. But we are discussing the present—the age of feminism, the age of women writers, the age when the novel has become the prime means of literary expression, and when novels are written chiefly for women, and as often as not by women.

The feminine touch upon literature is not favorable to man in fiction. Booth Tarkington has written admirably of the American boy, Sherwood Anderson of the male rebel against a sterile life, Harry Leon Wilson of certain humorous types, Christopher Morley of the philosophic masculine (but better of women), Joseph Hergesheimer of the sense-troubled male (but better also of women). Yes, but even so, the American male is most written about, at least in novels, by women, and they are not fair to him. They persist in studying him in only an aspect, only in his love relationships. For them, he is a creature either to be loved or to be hated; as a protagonist of their books he either loves or fails to love. His life story is his love story, and great shrewdness has been displayed by the modern school of artists in the psychological in relating every deed and every result of his career to the emotions aroused in him by women. What other important areas of sensation appear in Edith Wharton's men, or Zona Gale's? Why did (to take a group of well-known stories of the 1920's) "So Big" become a best seller if not because the man of the story plowed up mother instinct until it



cropped in greatness? What were the men in "The Little French Girl" or "The Lost Lady" or "Barren Ground," or what you will, but iron filings exposed to a magnet? Not that one objects to love stories. Every one writes love stories because love makes the best plot. The complaint is that women's men are so invariably subordinated to love, oriented by it, studied by means of it, given no valid existence, no passions, no career beyond it. Women, thanks either to their biology or their history or both, can usually be kept in this circumscribed area, for there they reach almost invariably their fullest expressiveness, and that is why I bring no complaint against men novelists for viewing their women as the women view men. But the passions of men cannot be so readily localized without damage, and women do focus upon the part and not the whole. I shall be contradicted of course by special cases, but the general principle is true.

All this is particularly hard upon American men because, as every one knows, they are not good lovers. They are good providers, as has been wisely said, but poor lovers. Thanks to many circumstances they have been backward, sometimes almost childish, in the refinement of the softer emotions, while uncannily precocious elsewhere. They have been puritanical because America was puritanical, they have been overbusy with the production of wealth because America supplied infinite business. They have been making careers or fortunes for themselves while Europeans were making love, because careers and fortunes had to be made. Passionate love, that grips the mind, creates motive, alters lives, contradicts ambition, has usually been strange to them after the twenties, has departed at least from their upper consciousness, for they have been no more immune than other men to the strains of married life or emotional aberration.

This in general we all know to be true, but it is the essayist not the novelist, or at least not the woman novelist who has told us. She has wrestled with this intractable American but let him go unless he would yield to love. She has, it seems to me, been far more desirous to reform him than to understand the scope of his character. Perhaps reform is not the right word for a determination to see man in only one of his many relationships, but certainly a good half of him—his strenuosities, his peculiar ambitions, his especial mental life—she has left uninterpreted. She has taken on fiction as a chosen profession, and yet, except in one direction, she is not trying to discover what the American man is really like.

The male novelists—Sinclair Lewis, Tarkington, Ring Lardner, Harry Leon Wilson—are satirizing the American man; the women are amorizing him. I do not know where to turn at the moment for an unprejudiced, three dimension study of my contemporaries in my own sex. The business stories in the magazines are too narrow and too conventionalized to hold him. Most of the novelists, and the women especially, neglect the things that clearly absorb him most. Perhaps these things are trivial, ephemeral—false lures that will go out. Perhaps, as I think, he should be a better lover. Nevertheless, there the man is; it is our business to see him all round, not to twist him into something that love can understand. Therefore one deplores the lack of a Dickens, that jolly old sentimentalist who could pack a hundred kinds of men in his books, and Thackeray who did not stop with love of women, and Fielding who put love in its place when necessary; and Trollope who could write a whole story in which no one ever was in love.

Women, of course, have changed with their opportunities. They also often prove to be Ionian, particularly when

energy, imagination, or necessity urges them toward creative work. They have become as Whitman would have had them—

They are not one jot less than I am, . . .

They are ultimate in their own right—

They are calm, clear, well possess'd of themselves.

If the story-telling function is to pass for a 'while, as seems probable, into women's hands chiefly, they must take more responsibility for the men, and these more virile women are able to do so. Willa Cather did so in "The Professor's House," a book which puzzled reviewers as well as readers when it appeared in the autumn of 1925. Its technique was unusual, not altogether successful, but that was not the only reason. Here was a novel with, as its central figure, a man whose real life, once he had passed the age of productive scholarship, lay in meditation and its fruits. He no longer loves his wife, nor she him, but there is no coldness between them and the fact is not important in the story, nor is either strongly moved because of the failure in their love. They are indeed a congenial couple, yet he will not follow her when a growing worldliness leads her in the way her children have gone. No, he secures his own soul at the sacrifice of family intimacy and risks affection to do so. He retires into himself, and that is the end of the story. But the women said, "The story is not finished." They demanded that something more should happen—there must be retribution, or recurrence of that emotional life which he had outgrown. They were not interested in what for him, and for Miss Cather, was the real story. The vital aspect of the man lay outside the circle of feminine relationship, and this they would not understand.

I do not agree with enthusiasts for the present who

think that the most golden age is now. Perhaps it is the age of gold for the writer of successful fiction, but some of the rest of us might prefer, if we had the choice, the Ming dynasty, eighteenth century England, or even the roaring 'forties. Who knows! Yet certainly this is one of the periods when life can be intensely lived by many and energy is widely distributed and easily called forth. Our strenuosity may be aimless, yet it is vivid and significant in itself. But what is the peculiar character of this energy which vitalizes the American male? How does it differ from Voltaire's marvelous vigor, or Cicero's tireless cerebration; how does he differ from Pendennis, from Mercutio, from Sir Charles Grandison, not only as an individual but also as a type? What are the men like in an age when feminist ideals and masculine concentration upon material development have both reached their peak? Few tell us, and least of all those who write of them oftenest, the women novelists. We get elaborate expositions of circumstances, we get photographic portraits from such realists as Theodore Dreiser, we get thousands of adventure stories in which the search for wealth is romantically displayed, but seldom do we get beneath the hard and resistant surface except when a man is in love, or when a woman (as in "Vera" or "Mr. Waddington of Wyck") hates him.

You may say that American men are not good subjects for fiction, that their lack of emotional sensitiveness makes them heavy material for the imagination to build with, and that when they grow richer in temperament the women especially will be juster, and more interested. That, in general, is what the American critics and novelists said of the Americans as a race in the early eighteen hundreds—that they were too little varied, thanks to the absence of great fortunes and well-marked classes, too

simple, too familiar, too ordinary for interest. And now it is clear that this very age, when the young men were pouring westward across the mountains into the vast wilderness of the most romantic valley in the world, and families were following after to make a new country in despite of danger and hardship—this American period, with its contrasts of lingering aristocracy and the new democrats, its savages, religious fanatics, barbarian white men gone wild on the frontier, epic founders of states—this age of conquest and settlement is to be one of the great reservoirs of story from which innumerable novels will be drawn.

No, it cannot be flatly asserted that a merchant or a lawyer is less valuable for fiction than a courtier, and it is unfortunate that the American man, who has given his time to activities which are extra curricular in the school of love, should be living through our own extraordinary period with so few imaginative projections of his type. The reactive effect of art upon the individual is greater than is generally believed. We live according to some ideal interpretation of ourselves which colors our actions and greatly affects the quality of our living. The soldier in all ages has been a notable example of this. The gentleman, when to be a gentleman meant more than to be clean and well mannered, had his projection visible in literature. The knight of the middle ages learned standards and self-vision from the stories of chivalry. But the Americans most typical of what we have prevaillingly done and been in America have no projections in fiction comparable to the character types in Victorian literature or the portraits of wits and gentlemen in the eighteenth century. It is a pity, and the women are largely to blame. Perhaps these Americans do not deserve great fiction, which it may be cannot be made from the harsh and meager material they supply; yet it would be better for

them if their imaginations were better supplied with good fiction about themselves, and better also for fiction, since no literature can be said to reach its optimum which leaves so much of contemporary life untouched.

It is the age of feminism in literature, and whatever the men may do, the crescent energy of women escaped from age-long disabilities is likely to carry them on in a field where they have singular advantages. The severe discipline of poetry and the drama, the logical basis of expository prose, the order and movement requisite for literary style are not, it would seem, women's work. Exceptional talents rise to the task, yet there is no reason to suppose that there will be more great poets, more great stylists, among women than hitherto until the biology and psychology of the sexes have undergone further evolution. In drama, especially realistic drama, one is not so sure. But in fiction intuition is essential, fancy at a premium, fascinated interest in humanity a prime asset, style relatively less important, problems of construction not too exigent, sheer thinking secondary to observation and invention. These are women's faculties, and leisure for their exercise is more readily obtained by women than by men. The feminine touch in fiction is going to be as familiar as the masculine for a long time to come. If men are to have justice it must become more than a touch upon one area of consciousness, it must be a grasp.

## II. *Thirty to Sixty*

THE wicked books of the world are generally written by middle-aged people for middle-aged people. Old age is too wise or too lazy or too dull to bother about wickedness and youth does not know enough to recognize real



sensuality when it sees it. The titillating novels that are the fashion just now, with their descriptions of what once was the untellable, the cheap magazines that tell the naked truth about everything, and the witty, smutty plays, are written by and for men and women over thirty-five. Young men and young women, even in this "hard-boiled" period, are easily shocked, and still more easily satiated. If a pestilence should carry off every one between thirty and sixty, sex literature would cool off like steam radiators in Spring. There would be the sneaking kind of pornography left, but the steady market for the warm suggestive book and the novel of explicit detail would collapse.

Since the War we have been morbidly interested in the morals of youth. Colleges have issued the results of questionnaires, stories have circulated, there has been as much talk as of Prohibition. Not by youth, however. It is the middle-aged that do the talking; they write the plays and stories about youth (some exceptions of course), they read about their doings, and ask for more.

That there has been a shift in moral attitude since 1914 is evident. That this shift has involved sex relations is also evident, although not more than the ideas of religion and duty. But it is not youth that has caused the shifting. They took their color from a society already in process of change. They have been formed by the middle-aged, and have done what their elders have already conceived in their hearts. If they are brazen about their new egoisms that is because they follow on naturally, not morbidly with a sense of sin. And if they go wrong more often than their fathers—which remains to be proven—they certainly are not so morbidly interested in the details.

When men and women reach middle age they have learned to understand experience, but usually find it un-

wise to go after it. They become parasites in their imagination upon youth. They write the books, because they can and youth cannot, and sometimes it is romantic adventure that they foist as an ideal upon a whole generation, and sometimes it is sexual adventure, but in any case their literary report of a youthful generation has to be discounted since it is made by elders who are sure to exaggerate what interests them.

We have been saying that this is the time for youth, that the youngster never had such a chance to express himself, that most novels deal with adolescence, and that everywhere youth, with its new ideas, wins. There is a good deal of mere assertion in these statements, and some bunk. What do we know about real youth anyway, the youth that has become adolescent since the War? Quite a little of its habits, but practically nothing of its inner life. It is the remembered youth of the middle-aged that has been dealt out to us so abundantly. It is the looseness of a generation that still remembers Victorianism which we have been getting. Age forty today was born in the 'eighties. The novels it writes of sex adventure and sex rebellions represent what a youth of, say, 1906, would feel if he were active, and still very young, today.

Middle age is notoriously the most earthy period of the human animal. It is then that humors break out and controls are dropped; it is then that the imagination is most vivacious. The really scurrilous writers have, with scarcely an exception, been middle-aged. Hence when morals relax it is the middle-aged who are likely to take the first advantage, and have done so, if the truth were out, in these demoralized post-War years. It was the middle-aged in literature who swung the pendulum from puritanical reticence to its opposite. And they write for each other.

It is therefore needless to view with alarm every inde-

cent book as a proof that our youth is going to the devil, or can go easily if it wants to. Even if the book is about youth, and even if it is damnable, it will probably be some goat, not some lamb, who will be put in jeopardy. "Frank" literature, as it is written today, does not much interest the young. And since it is so probable that mature persons have written the books that violate the proprieties we need not let our fear lest youth is corrupted prevent us from giving credit for the new fields of important experience covered by the sex extensions of modern literature. We can become more tolerant of originality, while holding the middle-aged responsible for their own pet vices of parasitical lasciviousness.

### III. "*Well Read*"

WHAT is a well-read man? Is he like the "well-dressed" man of the advertisements, who wears exactly what the majority of expensive dressers are putting on at the moment? Bacon had no such meaning in his famous essay. Good reading cannot be merely imitative, though it may be inspired. Second-hand tastes are not tastes at all, but appetites. No one will quarrel with these platitudes.

But another platitude does arouse controversy. Beware the man of one book, says the old aphorism. Whenever a new book is published read an old one, is a variant of the same statement. Stick to the pure gold of literature and let the tinsel go, is just a third wording of the same idea, which stated in plain English says that the well-read man is he who reads nothing but what time has proved to be the best. Beware of him, for he carries a heavy charge drawn from greatness.

These slogans are popular with scholars, teachers, and

librarians, and naturally, for they are really the armament of defense complexes. Readers are like sheep, running in herds toward the last grass to turn green, no matter how rank or how thin it is. To read the new is always easy for them, to appreciate the old always difficult. Old books have to be taught; new books teach themselves. Hence, when the scholar speaks his contempt for new books, the rubbish of our times, he is on the defensive. He exaggerates the demerits of his own day in order to emphasize by contrast the classic excellences which most readers so willingly neglect.

What then is a well-read man? Certainly not a reader who reads only modern books. He has no background and no standards of comparison. He gets the milk of good books, but not the cream, and he is the ready dupe of every shallow imitator. No one disputes this.

But the opposite is equally true. The man who reads no new books is not and cannot be well read. He may spend his nights with Addison and his days with the "Divine Comedy." He may read the "Faëry Queene" three times or work upon the Greek tragedians until the barriers of language fall. He may be soundly based in all the great classics, but if he reads no modern books he is not well read. If the greatest clerks are not the wisest men, this is one of the reasons—their knowledge sometimes stops short of their own times. And if criticism written by scholars has so often been wrong, this again is one reason why.

The question can be argued either backward or forward. The only age which a man knows of his own knowledge and with some certainties at least, is his own. He cannot see it as a whole, but he knows some parts, and knows them with indisputable accuracy and with an emotional rightness that is more than reason. Our best history is documented guessing, our best interpretations

of earlier literature miss much that Shakespeare or Milton or Goethe meant to their own ages. A reader must read in the light of his own first-hand knowledge of life, and the less he knows of life, the less he will get from the vital heart of the classics. This does not mean that the reader of Sophocles should attend incest cases in the local police court. It does mean that the perception of contemporary life, which to a devoted reader will most often be focussed by modern books, must be vivid, if he is to see the gold of earlier writers as more than dead metal.

Or put it another way, and assert that literature is a continuous process without breaks, and therefore without a point at which classics cease and "modern rubbish" begins. Academic critics in every generation have spoken of such a point as if it really existed. Usually it is indicated in the youth of the speaker: sometimes in the century just past. There is no such point; there is only a change in focus. Books get too near us; we see too many of them; no one has provided glasses for us; it is easier to talk of modern rubbish which began to accumulate after the last great writer died. This of course is nonsense, very solemn nonsense.

I will challenge, therefore, the title of well-read in anyone, no matter how erudite, how steeped in the best of earlier literatures, who has no discrimination in, because no vital contacts with, modern literature. Among English readers I distrust the critic of Shakespeare who has not read Shaw, as much as the critic of Shaw who has not read Shakespeare. I will listen to no lectures on the psychology of Racine by critics who have not read in Freud and Jung (imagine Racine not reading there!). Nor am I more interested in the philosophy of behaviorists who know only behaviorism.

But are there intellectual hermits in our civilization?

Does not the man of one book read modern novels on the sly? Is not the scholar who despises modern stuff and nonsense deterred by the cost, the number, and difficulty of judging new books without the guidance from tradition to which he is accustomed? Is the contempt for one's own time in literature only a pose? It may be, or it may be just the scholar's way of saying that most new books in the light of eternity, are rubbish, which is too obvious to argue about. But if a pose, it is a pose dangerous to good judgment. Those who despise their own literature will never understand it, and if they do not comprehend their own times, what certainty, or probability even, that they will be masters of antiquity!

#### IV. *Education for Authors*

PUBLICLY, every one commends education; privately, many condemn it. "He was ruined by a formal education" is a familiar statement; as familiar as "Thanks to escaping a formal education, he became a writer of real originality."

There is truth in both remarks, but not the truth which the speakers, indulging in the supercilious pose of the emancipated mind, believed they were uttering. Education is the most pervasive and lasting of influences, especially a bad education, and if it gives the mind rules without power of thinking it handcuffs the intellect to convention. And it is equally true that the naturally fine mind which has to educate itself, and *does so*, is unbeatable. So is the castaway on the desert island who survives by learning to subsist on his own resources; but we do not recommend desert islands as a universal experience.

When education is no more than discipline—and the



idea that it should be just discipline lurks in many a teacher's consciousness—it crushes the buds of originality as fast they are put out, but to grow undisciplined minds is not the answer to the problem. It is a hundred times easier to point out men and women of distinction who have suffered for lack of a formal education than the reverse.

This country is a classic example, for almost since the founding of the republic we have had a more or less—chiefly less—effective elementary education, and abundant instances where self-education was the only way to get beyond it. The tragedies and mishaps of American literature are more often due to this self-education than to the formalities of rigorous discipline.

The New Englanders in literature were perhaps mis-educated for the profession of *belles lettres*. If Emerson had been more conscious in the Harvard of his day of anything esthetical that was not at the same time mathematical or moral, the result—for his poetry especially—might have been excellent. And one feels that Longfellow's severe training in linguistics over-developed the imitative already in his nature.

The real illumination comes when one turns to the self-educated Americans who also were men of genius—the tragic Poe, for example, with his gift for critical penetration and his quivering sense of beauty. His stories are marred by extravagances, his poetry breaks from its best into defects of taste, his mind, in spite of its keen sense of form, cannot control its richness, and is always pursuing half philosophies, and taking refuge in assumptions of range and profundity. It is inconceivable that more formal education would have tamed his genius; certain that it would have made him less tawdry at his worst moments, more free at his best.

And that other American genius of the first rank, Walt Whitman—the most sympathetic critic must admit the vagaries of his philosophy, the unnecessary eccentricities of his technique, the cock-sureness of his opinion, the lack of order and the lack of taste in his efforts whenever the flame of his genius wavered. Surely a little more formal education would not have hurt Walt. Perhaps it would not have carried his poetry higher, but it would have salvaged much waste if only by giving him more power of detachment from his obsessive ego.

Education, as we practice it, is a very imperfect instrument, and it is patent that a man can be educated in the current sense without knowing as much of the true values of life as an uneducated Arab. But that may mean only an immunity to all but the most utilitarian effects of education, or an education badly administered. In any case, it is easy to cite many American authors of the last twenty years who did not know enough to get the best from their talents, did not know how to control their thinking, or handle their facts. The American novelist and short story writer especially has displayed a frequent lack of education. He has depended upon natural aptitude and a mechanical technique. No one who reads widely in current American books can fail to note the results. Many well-known writers do not know their own trade. They do not know literature one-quarter as well as a lawyer must know law. They are trying to express their thoughts for the benefit of others with a half-training in thinking. Education never made a genius—but without it many a genius would have been only a freak or a sensation.

*v. Ideas and Poetry*

IN George Moore's "Conversations in Ebury Street," Mr. de la Mare, Mr. Freeman, and Moore himself discuss pure poetry, which they decide to be objective and entirely free from ideas personal to the writer. The favorites go down by ranks; Keats is discarded (did they forget "La Belle Dame sans Merci"?); Browning and Tennyson drop into the basket together; Poe and the Elizabethans triumph. Thus is pure poetry achieved by surgical operation.

The lover of poetry usually passes through three ages in his esthetic progress. At first he likes simple, sensuous poetry made up of familiar emotions expressed in figures readily grasped. Poetry tells him nothing he does not know, gives him no feeling he has not expressed, but by an elevation of tone, a fertility of comparison, and a pleasant music, it sheds a sunset glow over his everyday world. He likes "The Village Blacksmith" and "Auld Lang Syne."

In the second age of poetry the reader seeks for ideas. It is his mind that craves exaltation and his emotions are best reached through his intellect. He ponders Browning, discovers Donne, quotes Meredith and Emerson, tries to read Goethe in the original, and dismisses the merely beautiful with some contempt.

The third stage is further sophistication. We grow weary of ideas in poetry and seek only for emotional expressiveness. The line counts more than the thought, the image is an end in itself. We discard, with Mr. Moore and his friends, all Tennyson but "The Lady of Shalott." Poets with a message give us nausea. The Chinese lyric of pure image seems an ideal toward which English must slowly struggle. If we are to praise the poet, he must be

a delicate receiving set upon which the pulse of the universe is recorded in patterns of sound whose delicacy depends upon a nicety in an instrument which ideas, philosophies, a message for humanity, might blunt or destroy. We ask of a poem not, what does it mean? but, what does it do? We detest both the logical and the obvious.

This understood, it is easy to see why an age that pumped ethics and philosophy into its poetry, like the Victorian, loses friends among connoisseurs so quickly. Time and the natural progression of taste both outmode it, unless, as in the eighteenth century, poetic taste is anemic, and, like a starved animal, does not pursue its normal development. Easy also to understand the rich insistence of the pre-Raphaelites upon sense impressions. Still easier to comprehend the high price in the contemporary lyric of the image, and of the fresh and striking phrase.

Mr. Moore himself in his taste is pre-Raphaelite. Craftsmanship fascinates him, and he is a rebel against the art of moralizers who hurl badly forged thunderbolts. Pure poetry for him is poetry that is *not* subjective, *not* ethical, *not* ideological, because he is weary of that kind. But a George Moore of the twenty-first century may cry aloud amid a profusion of lovely lyrics for pure poetry that is *not* objective, *not* empty of ideas, *not* devoid of ethical tendency. The taste for poetry has a direct relation to the human need. It is not what goes into the poem but what comes out of it that determines success and the effect of poetry is conditioned by the temperament of the age and the reader.

We may get purer poetry by freeing the poetical mind from morbid subjectivity, for confessions of past sins or present passions and exhibitions of emotional complexes characteristic of abnormal states are growing wearisome.

Lyric poetry has become a last refuge for private egoism in a more and more public world. Yet it is equally true that we may get finer poetry by an infusion of new ideas. Lucretius is not the less valuable because of his atomic theories and Wordsworth's philosophy made him great so long as he remained a poet. Pure poetry is not poetry minus ideas, subjective or otherwise; it is synonymous with good poetry, whether evolution or a cherry blossom is its content and inspiration.

But, of course, the gentlemen in Ebury Street were quite right. They were making an anthology and some principle of exclusion was essential. De la Mare knew poetry well enough to quote freely and they restrained him with difficulty from recalling too much!

## VI. *Things*

GEORGE MOORE rounds off his attack upon subjective verse by a summary statement that pure poetry deals with things not ideas, for ideas change while things throughout the ages remain the same. Taken literally, this is fantastically untrue. Things, even if they have an objective reality not determined by the accident of the senses, change as much as and with the generations. In spite of Keats, the voice of the nightingale that found a path through the sad heart of Ruth when she stood in tears amid the alien corn, was not the same to which he listened darkling. That the corn was alien and Ruth picturesque was Keats's idea, and so was listening to a bird song at all, which was not an Old Testament practice. Romanticism has swept the nightingale into its glamorous arms. Indeed every thing more subtle in its effects than plain food and drink changes with changing human atti-

tudes. Swords, wives (to be regarded for the moment only, as things), clothes, mountains, temples, oceans, flowers, and kings are this to you and that to me, and even more, this to that century and that to another. If only the actions of the just smell sweet and blossom in the dust, so, and more certainly, only the outward aspect of things remains constant—the emotion-touched images, which are their sole reality in the mind, are as mutable as the seasons. Daffodils or snow peaks or draughts of Hippocrene, like Antony “cannot hold this visible shape,” so strangely do different ages regard them.

There is indeed no poetry of constant things, but only a making of symbols from out of the stuff of the visible world to represent the changing moods of the sensitive.

Moore, of course, was well aware of this mobility, for he had only to compare his own descriptions of mountain country with Wordsworth's to see that if a peak never flies from its firm base it assuredly changes its make-up in the eyes of beholders. The truth in his remark is not in what he said, but in what he may have meant, though he seems to be content with his epigram.

For it is by testing the mind with close observation of things that we realize the continuity of living and indeed assure ourselves of being alive in any real sense at all. A flowering cherry is a lesson in history and, rightly seen, guarantees the existence of souls in Japan who, by apprehending it so differently, prove that there is more than mere optical reaction in the sight. The violet is neither timid nor shrinking, but when writers have been sensitive to defenseless beauty they have looked at this flower and found it so. Consider its flaunting clumps of purple green-embedded in the exuberant April meadow and know yourself by this fresh observation a part of the flux and reflux of psychic history. If only the firefly and the



hummingbird had been European they would have different emotional values today. Our literature has but slightly known them, hence they are seen as such, not with a difference. What the poet thinks of democracy, or of duty to the state, or of the causes of poverty, is of as little endurance as a statute or a scientific theory. But when he flings his imagination upon visible things, he brings back a report of the world as it looks (and therefore is) in his time. It is not by accident that the descriptive passages of famous poetry have the longest life.

Modern poetry in English is scanty and poor in its treatment of things. The imagists should have satisfied even Moore, but there is too much ego in their earth. The thing is sacrificed to make a phrase, there is trickery of words to present an impressionists' picture, all mood and temper, instead of the serene, revealing fact. Emphasis rests too heavily upon the observer's temperament. As for the realists, they have been fooled by the novelty of merely new things, phonographs, airplanes, bath tubs, railroads, tin cans, which, for obvious reasons, did not get into earlier literature. They have filled their poems and their novels with things, but chiefly new things mentioned and described, as if to say, you never heard of the clang of a concrete street before, hence if I insert it I achieve.

But there is no virtue in catalogues of things. It is only their significance that counts, and significance is rich only if it means and has meant many things to many men. That is why it is extraordinarily difficult to make a sonnet upon an electric locomotive, and still possible to write a good poem about a daffodil—or even a lark.

VII. *The Art of the Short Story*

WHAT has become of the art of the short story? Twenty years ago the literary journals rang with its celebrations. What the short story was, what it could do for literature, what it might serve in life, was a daily theme for the writer of criticism.

Collections of short stories drop today from the presses like eggs from a prize hen: there are rewards, dinners, memorials, but the talk is of the past, not the future, of success not potentiality, of technique and marketability and type, not of hope and novelty and desire. Like the automobile the short story has become standardized and the changes are in model not in kind.

The truth is that while the reception committee was greeting the best designs of the year on the front porch the art of the short story slipped out the back door. It wearied in the moment of success and sought refuge elsewhere.

And where but in the novel! That originality which with elaborate skill focussed narrative upon a burning point of experience—if you look for it now you will find it in the new novel of flowing consciousness. The novels of Virginia Woolf, of John dos Passos, of Joyce, of Huxley, of Thornton Wilder, of David Garnett, are essentially short stories. They are not short, but they are brief; they are not focussed upon a moment, but they are narrowed to a phase. "Mrs. Dalloway" is as concentrated, as unified, as dependent upon a single strand of suspense as a story of Poe. The art, it appears, was not in brevity in words but in sharpness of focus. A line accomplishes the desired purpose, if a point no longer serves. To seek a revealing situation which, captured in brief narrative, should be

significant for life, was one way of achievement, Maupassant's way, Kipling's way, O. Henry's way. To penetrate the consciousness on a straight line, coördinating external life to the mental state of the hero, is another way; to link episodes on a lengthening chain the continuity of which alone is significant, because it is ego and the links incongruity, is still another way, and these are modern and the chosen methods of novelists wearying of the broad Victorian canvas, discontent with the simple situation, wishing to go deeper, truer, narrower, toward the goal of reality.

Henry James was an intermediary in this new art of the stretched short story. His later novels, "The Wings of the Dove" for example, are studies of single situations expanded to the bursting point. Subtlety could go no further in that direction, could describe, analyze, project no further. So subtlety pierced inward, and accepting its limitation (like science) to truth about a man before the picture of men should be painted, drove its tiny bore on a threadlike line into the core of the brain. Henceforth and for a while the waves of sensation vibrating upon that inner consciousness were to interest critics. And no method of writing, however fantastic, not even the endless musings of a Dorothy Richardson novel, not even the rhythmic nonsense of Gertrude Stein's style, nor the inconsecutive episodes of "Manhattan Transfer," nor the trivial worthless experience of tired Parisians, nor the half-mad moonings of pathological cases, seems without significance.

It is all extraordinarily interesting and technically important to a high degree. Yet after all, the stretched short story is like the old short story, a device, a means, a barrow in which one picks up what the great novelists of scope and power have left unregarded by the wayside. The

comparison may seem unfair to the best writers. It is like a new projectile of greater penetration the principles of which will later be applied to great shells that bursting break the crust of life and reveal its inner chambers. But let us drop confusing figures. The experimental novel is still an experiment. It cannot yet satisfy the human desire to see society depicted in the large, men and women, not merely psychoses, neuroses, pathologies, states of consciousness. In English, Galsworthy, Bennett, Willa Cather—to choose typical examples—are doing for this generation what some later novelists, who will adapt to the world what is being tried upon the ego, will accomplish for the next. Old-fashioned? Yes, perhaps. But we should have no record of our society in its normal aspects, no "characters" in the age-old sense if they, too, tried to write books where breadth was sacrificed to depth and intensity.

### VIII. *Travel Books*

IN the Western Hemisphere we are only partly weaned from our European environment. Even the Indian, so the anthropologists say, was but half at home in his continent and had not yet learned to endure the extremes of American heat. We are more adaptable, and have met a tropic summer and an arctic winter half way; but in fall we still live as if showery England were our home.

In Northern America October is the time for travel. Our spring is brief and belated, and never in American literature will be a dominant theme of lyric poetry, as in England. It comes in a mist of greens that harden almost over a week-end into the monotony of summer. But October turns slowly through lucent days that dawn upon blue aster and crimson maple and close upon garnet slopes

of sumach and purple domes of oak. Woods drop their veils and sight is free of their inner chambers. The South is hazy; the clear North at sunset sends down a wind tingling with spruce. The birds travel slowly through drifting birch woods and across blurred meadows; but weather is only one stimulant more for the busy American. We capitalize the thrill of October, and Indian summer drops gold unheeded behind the back doors of such a nation.

At least we read travel books in autumn—the publishers see to that. More and more Americans seem to take their real travel vicariously—their real travel, for taking the Broadway Limited, with barber and manicure inside and a blurred strip of signboards without, is movement, not travel; not such travel as lies at every one's back door in the American October. Taking travel vicariously is better for the soul than a hauling across America, or whirring a ribbon of road, bound to the wheel of your car, blind with the dust of its speed. For the best travel books do precisely what most of us cannot do—no more than write poetry and make music—the authors are themselves October if it is in October they are journeying.

There are two kinds of good travel books, books of solid fact and books of penetrative imagination. Honest books that give facts of a scene or a country are rare. We want fewer books of "Beauties" and "Historic Houses," less sentimental description and romantic anecdote, and more studies that lift a land into perspective and explain it.

No such stipulation for solid detail can be made with the imaginative writer who can set up a reciprocal current between his personality and a momentary environment, and then make his book. Thus came the great travel books, among them Boswell's "Corsica," "Arabia Deserta," Kingslake's "Eothen," Thoreau's "Week," Stevenson's

"Travels With a Donkey," "The Bible in Spain," "A Sentimental Journey."

What makes the great books endure is very decidedly not what is seen so much as how it is felt and written. Gilbert White of Selborne proved long ago that the world can be thrilling, rightly apprehended, at home. There is an agitation and excitement set up by all experience in the souls of these born travelers which communicates to the reader as by waves of the ether some of the essential reality of things observed, so that he responds, thrilling as he reads. The somber, brooding mind which feels dell and dingle, and the words of Isopel Berners, and the gestures of The Flaming Tinman in "Lavengro" is "Lavengro." The story, the incidents, seen by you or me away from the power of Borrow's *aura*, are nothing. You met Petulengro yesterday and thought he was a sneak thief.

Borrow took his October, and so did Rockwell Kent, and Masfield in his time, and so does Robert Frost. Unfortunately, the authors of many travel books could not rise to their occasions. They have felt that because they have been to the Gaspé or Ketchikan or Andorra they should write a book about it, whereas unless you know your region as few travel writers do, your only subject is your own soul, and unless that is changed by experience there is nothing to write. It is better to walk in October, no matter how insensitively, than to read such books.

### IX. *What is Beauty?*

AND so the atom has melted like Hamlet's substantial flesh and become a mere congeries of vibrations. With it goes matter in any form resembling our everyday conception of reality; and the most lucid description of



the basis of our corporeality is still Shakespeare's "We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

For twenty years, more or less, or ever since the new Physics began its revelations, we have been told just this, not only in books which few read but in lectures that many hear, in the Sunday supplements, and now on the radio. The effect seems to be exactly nil. A potato to the viewing eye is still a potato, and the certainty that the sole reality of a chair that does not disintegrate upon investigation is its solidity beneath the sitter, apparently counts for nothing in our philosophy. It will count for little in space and time until some further scientific magic destroys even the illusion of appearance. But to suppose that thinking is to proceed unaffected by these new facts of existence is to misread history.

A resounding demonstration by miracles, real or supposed, that things were not what they seemed, sent men flocking in earlier centuries to moralists and theologians. Why not now? Partly, of course, because we are skeptical as to inexplicable miracles. But also for the excellent reason that moral philosophy is difficult and has no short cuts to unexpected revelation, and religion is subtle and requires an inner change, while science is relatively easy and yields at every pressure from the mentally alert some new and demonstrable hypothesis which seems to be a step toward a final explanation. The public indeed are more credulous than the scientists. When they substitute the authority of experiment for the authority of tradition they accept the one as fully as they believed in the other.

Yet the moment will come when the study of the nature of so-called matter will no longer be relevant to the needs of man. We shall comprehend the machine from bolt to bolt, and turn to the unsolved problems of the driver. In

the meantime some reflections already clamor for notice. Landscape, the human form, light and shadow, speech, with which art, especially literary art, must deal, are, scientifically considered, modes of vibration, are rhythm if they are anything concrete that can be given a name. Their beauty, which in this utilitarian age has been regarded as a luxury, a non-essential, an intangible, is thus one of the few tangible attributes of a mysterious world. Motion, force, mean nothing of themselves to the senses except motion and force, but beauty is more than sensation, it is our perception of harmony in rhythms, and rhythm, unlike the appearance of matter, essentially exists.

Art then is a sound instinct. To feel the suavity of a snow-clad winter night is not to commit the pathetic fallacy, but rather to perceive a harmony of light in curving slope and silent elm and farm house adequately set, which is more real than earth and tree and building. And the insistence upon beauty in style and subject and final effect for all literature and all art is a sound instinct also. There is no way to make the dead representations of print or canvas or marble share the inner reality of what they imitate except through rhythm, static or active: this is the truth, which Keats said *was* beauty.

The jumbled ugliness of a modern street is, if you please, a misuse of the potential harmonies of matter. It has probably as evil an effect on the human race as bad sanitation, though the proof is not so easy. Nature, which seldom relapses into disorderly ugliness and is never squalid though by no means always beautiful, manifests surprising harmonies which are presumably not unconnected with the rhythmic qualities of composing matter, rocks that crystallize, ferns that cluster, trees that bend. That which makes for beauty rather than that which clogs harmony seems to be most revelatory of truth. Good

poetry tells more than prose, and may one day—as in the past—be regarded as more practical because more revealing in the lives of men.

And therefore, so long as there are fine minds that feel finely there can be no complete satisfaction in the urbanized world of slovenly houses, clipped speech, signboards, flat emotions, and machine lives which so many dread as our future, simply because there will always be rebels against it. Such a syndicated disposition of matter must seem senseless to those who know that there is no objective reality physically considered but rhythmic force. This dawning perception will not prevent the bridging of the Golden Gate, save old houses that are themselves harmony, or make decorum popular, but as philosophy takes new premises from science, and logic and intuition begin to push out into the unknowable from our new extensions of knowledge, the defenders of beauty as the most accessible truth will grow stronger and more numerous. We shall have Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to the Rhythmic Atom in competition with the Steel Trust and Los Angeles. For stone is only gas under pressure and may conceivably become gas again, and the cells of the body are only carbo-hydrates which may be fabricated from water and coal, but the form of a cathedral and the aspect of the human body are entities in themselves without reference to substance, even if inseparable from it. They at least are conceivable reality, and therefore worthy of the highest estimation. What else is real? That is for metaphysicians to answer.

## ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

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## IN TIME OF CONFUSION

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**I**N the United States millions of honest and otherwise intelligent people are still living intellectually in the nineteenth century. Their bodies are in the twentieth century, their appetites are satisfied by its devices, but their minds obstinately refuse to admit either the existence or the necessity of a new era.

The advance agents of a new and different twentieth century cried "wolf" too often. Everything novel and naughty and sensational in the eighteen nineties was called "*fin de siècle*," and in nineteen hundred we rubbed our eyes and looked about to see what the new world of the twentieth century was really like. It was just the same. Books were the same. Morals were the same. Again in 1914, when the War began, and on to 1918, every writer with a bent toward philosophy—and all non-combatants were philosophic in these days—said and repeated that the world would never be the same again; yet by 1920 it was unchanged in fundamental ideas, although in customs much the worse.

Nevertheless, the real end of the century had stolen in quietly in the meantime. It is marked sharply enough now to an observer by the emergence in both life and literature of an eager desire to get rid of old conventions and come to a new grip with the reality behind appear-



ance. We remember, as we look back, that Bernard Shaw, who was a major prophet of change for the English-speaking peoples, had warned us of the coming revolution; but the alteration of values which began between 1908 and 1912 swept far beyond his little group of intellectuals. It had arrived in literature before 1914, as any one can discover to his satisfaction by reading John Masefield, H. G. Wells, Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost, Arnold Bennett, or Amy Lowell. The War, which hastened decay in weak things and development in strong, was a powerful accelerator in the value of the new ideas. But it did not cause the change; it was change.

And now those who have gained or retained in middle age some sharpness of perception must realize that they have been swung round the curve of a century. They are not yet perhaps in the full twentieth century, but they breathe its air. They breathe its air which stirs up strange sensations in the spirit, the nature of which they often mistake. Their minds often lag behind their senses, and the alterations in manners, morals, esthetics, family relations, religion, and especially the manifestations of all this unrest in literature, which are visible everywhere, are charged to the War, to decadence, to barbarism, to perversity, to Bolshevism, to everything but the real cause, which is that we have entered new times that have brought new minds with them.

Imagine the meeting of an intelligent European of the naïve Middle Ages with a Chinese philosopher who had a thousand years of sophistication behind him. Granted that they could talk together in some intermediate tongue, nevertheless, they would not have used the same language. Ideas, beliefs, customs, hopes would be so different that each would persistently misunderstand the other in everything but the barest elements of living. The thing

happened to Marco Polo, and his famous book of travels, in spite of the accuracy of his observations, proves that in all his years in Cathay he never learned to distinguish between the culture of a parvenu Mongol living in Chinese luxury and the genuine Chinese civilizations. The Chinese liked peace and the Mongols didn't—that was about as far as he discriminated.

The same thing, on a different scale of course, is happening today, and it accounts for many unpleasant twinges of human nature. The old and the new are arguing together and they do not speak the same language. The bitterness of Fundamentalism, the split over Prohibition, the reckless libertinism of the current stage and current books, honest men defending what seems to others to be indecency in literature, intelligent readers completely confused by works of art that are declared by their authors to be true pictures of the times—all this indicates a conflict in minds which has got to be understood before we so much as take sides. There is no use in arguing over morality, or art, or literature, or happiness until both parties to the discussion understand what each means by the terms they use. I say a book is moral when my opponent calls it immoral. We may both be right according to the meaning which we severally put upon morality, in which case our argument should not be over the book, which we may both agree is finely written, but over morality. The Scopes case was tragi-comedy from beginning to end. One side argued for faith, the other for science, and neither seemed to have any conception of what his enemy was defending. We need the services of such "straighteners" as Samuel Butler described in his "Erewhon" who straightened the warped minds that were the cause of evil in the state.

I propose to stick to literature, which is a good clearing-house for a discussion of this kind because a book is a

book and stands there to be argued about, whereas opinions waver in every wind of doctrine. When the real *fin de siècle* came a different spirit entered into literature, which still remains and still seems modern. It was about this time that what we now call the Fundamentalists' conceptions of life and the universe, upon which English literature of the nineteenth century had largely been based, began visibly to disintegrate in many important places under the impact of applied science. New books that were really new were built upon different—not necessarily upon better—ideas. There is as sharp a contrast between a play of Shaw or a novel of Wells and a story of Kipling or a novel by Trollope, as between "Pilgrim's Progress" and Congreve's "Way of the World," or Dr. Johnson's "Rasselas" and Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." Basic assumptions have changed, and the books have changed with them.

I do not mean in style, although that, of course, changed too. I mean in that philosophy of the unphilosophic mind which we call attitude toward life. I mean in conceptions of conduct and duty, in hopes and fears. It was about this time that the new realistic poetry of Masfield, Frost, Amy Lowell began to lavish imagination on themes that seemed shockingly unpoetical to lovers of the nineteenth century. It was about then that Hardy with his pessimistic determinism was accepted as the great English novelist of the period. It was about then that Conrad's unsentimental romance caught our imagination. It was about then that the stage swung from fantasy toward sophisticated, satiric realism; and Disillusion took the place of the Deity as the solution of dramatic conflict. Nothing has happened in English literature since that is really new except an increase of nationalism in America and a slant toward cynical irony in England. At this fateful period success sud-

denly came to those who sought a new reality. They got through to the public, and my readers will themselves remember the disturbing quality of Shaw's plays, the crass excitement of H. G. Wells' earlier novels, the remarkable transformation of that grim Scandinavian Ibsen from a joke into a portent. All good readers went through the experience, and readers of every kind have been let down into the new reality in some fashion since. Some of them liked it and more did not. Some of them realized that the books they were reading were based upon premises which differed widely from the Victorian code; others never saw that a different spirit was infusing itself in literature, but thought that the new generation was writing badly and should be scolded.

We who are now middle-aged were brought up on the old, and still love it, yet read the new. We at least should be able to forget controversy and note what actually has happened. Thackeray was dead before we were born, but we, at least, do not call "Vanity Fair" obsolete. Meredith wrote "Diana of the Crossways" in 1885, and was regarded, by us, even in 1900, as a little ahead of his time. Kipling came to fame in the 'nineties, and was the hero of reading youth until the change of taste in the second decade of the twentieth century. I do not propose to discuss the literary qualities or the particular ideas of these excellent fictionists. What is interesting for this discussion are the truths that they in common with their age assumed to be obvious. What they accepted without question may be taken as the fundamentals of their period. If these differ from the bases of modern literature then we cannot complain if modern literature is different.

Thackeray was sure of a moral system in the universe that coincided with the judgment of good men. Those worldlings of his in "Vanity Fair," who were meant to

give his readers a horrid shiver, do not themselves doubt that the wicked will be punished, unless caution and safe incomes enable them to turn good before it is too late. But an adventuress who tries to beat that game is doomed. Becky Sharp cannot play safe; she has to be predatory because there is an irreconcilable conflict between her personality and the environment which she needs for self-expression. She succeeds by sinning, and Thackeray points out the awful moral of her decay.

We thought in those early days that "Vanity Fair" was cynical because, I suppose, of the too evident fact that a wicked charming woman was the most valuable personality in the drama, and stupid people, like Dobbin and Amelia, summed up all the virtue in the piece. Few modern women would call it, I think, anything but sentimental, and few sociologists would accept its conclusions at all. If Becky was immoral, so the twentieth century would say, the society that suppressed her was guiltier still. Hers was a tragedy, not of morals, but of frustrated brains. Not so Thackeray. For him, God's in his Heaven and, although all is not right with the world, nevertheless, a woman who interferes with the system in order to express her personality will be dealt with before the other sinners. The vast question of social responsibility out of which Galsworthy made his "Forsyte Saga" is no question at all for Thackeray. He does not so much as speculate on what would be the theme of a modern novel.

George Meredith was a modernist in his day, supposed to be beyond and ahead of the earthlings of his time. The once famous preface to "Diana of the Crossways," regarded in 1900 as an intelligence test for intellectuals, may be remembered by the archeologically minded. He was a feminist almost before feminism:



The position [of a woman under breath of scandal] . . . asks for more than justice from men, for generosity, our civilization not being yet of the purest. That cry of hounds at her disrobing by Law is instinctive. She runs and they give tongue; she is a creature of the chase. Let her escape unmangled, it will pass in the record that she did once publicly run, and some old dogs will persist in thinking her cunninger than the virtuous which never put themselves in such positions, but ply the distaff at home. Never should the reputation of a woman trail a scent! How true! and true also that the women of wax-work never do; and that the women of happy marriages do not; nor the women of holy nunneries; nor the women lucky in their arts. It is a test of the civilized to see and hear, and add no yapping to the spectacle.

Diana, softer yet even more brilliant than Becky, is a victim of her own fiery spirit which beats and burns against the cage of convention. She is ruined by scandal, saved by one who believes that she is moral whatever the color of her acts. This is, if you please, modern; yet Meredith never questions the law, never questions the intention of God to make fine women virtuous; his tragedy is always of a "*forte et belle*" soul who, wishing well, is tangled in circumstance. If there had been no rigidly moral universe there would have been no drama. Let Diana once say, I have a right to leave my intolerable husband, and let society agree with her, and poof! the whole story is gone. But this society which was so cruel to the woman who arouses the sexual in man, so cruel to the youth of Richard Feverel and the beauty of Diana Warwick seeking expression, is fixed for Meredith, and attractive in its fixity. He accepts its moral code as he accepts its aristocratic social laws as something so comfortably stable that sarcasm for the one and irony for the other are but glosses on an ac-



cepted text. A horse or a dog cannot be too finely bred for the fine society that Meredith, the tailor's son, so dearly loved, but let a woman be too witty, too beautiful, too energetic, too ravishing, and she has to pay, can be saved only by finding some honest fellow who will lead her out of the arena. Could any enlightened novelist, writing after 1910, write upon a theme like that?

Kipling was never much interested in women. Men were his darlings, and particularly one type of the male. This was a "he-man" of the "red-blooded" type, afterward taken over by the American movies, though with much slurring of the original traits. Kipling's man, of course, was one of the by-products of the imperialistic idea, and really lived in the imagination of the English public school. In life, whatever his true psychology, he talked somewhat like Kipling's hero and acted in character often enough to justify the great tradition of the British empire. Realism, however, does not concern us; the question is, what Kipling and Kipling's man thought to be so indisputably true as not to need defense.

This writer, who was at first accused of being brutal and who has never been accepted as their exponent by the governing class of England, was, nevertheless, the last powerful writer of fiction to make his plots turn upon the definition of a gentleman. Indeed, most of those brilliant stories which we read with such excitement a score and more years ago are lessons in the code of what Kipling meant by a gentleman. In "The Jungle Books" he learns how to be stoical, how to be fair, how to be modest, how to be aggressive; in "Kim" he gets the same education, plus a respect for (it is impossible to say a comprehension of) religion. The beauty of holiness in the old lama is to be protected by the strong; but of course a gentleman does not have to be religious. In a hundred short stories

Kipling applies the public-school code, which says *noblesse oblige* and *honi soit qui mal y pense* and *Do and Dare* and *The White Man's Burden* and *The Lord helps those who help themselves* and *Self-Knowledge, Self-Respect, and Self-Control*, and the other precepts which were left out of the Sermon on the Mount, which was not written for this kind of gentleman.

Racial superiority is another item, a very particular kind of superiority based upon organizing power and upon character, by which Kipling means, not intelligence or spirituality, but the ability to hold fast to duty. And what does he mean by duty? Loyalty to the principles of an orderly life on the orderly English model described above. For these he is willing to have his men fight, to have them crush recalcitrant peoples, to sacrifice themselves. That is being a gentleman. It is the morality of a man's world, specifically of an English public-school world in which a very large section of the universe is entirely unrepresented, and it is just as fixed as Thackeray's moral order for the sexes, or Meredith's conception of a social order in which abnormal personalities like Diana get into trouble. All this Kipling takes for granted as the philosophy by which one lives.

I am not, strange as it may seem to the new inverted puritans who think that all their fathers' thoughts are musty, raising a question as to the rightness or wrongness of the fundamental assumptions which underlie these books, as fundamental assumptions underlie all books. Nor am I pretending to do more than hit off in the briefest terms some of the life-philosophy of the last century. It is enough for the purpose of this essay to reveal these convictions—call them prejudices if you wish—unquestioned and indestructible beneath the creative imagination, as firm and fundamental as the ultimate granite

beneath a modern office building. Nor does the question of art properly enter. We used to think of Kipling as the prime romanticist, but in some of his stories the top dressing of romance begins to wash off and the Ideals of the British Empire to shoulder through. The Chinese, one supposes, would regard "The Jungle Books" or "Puck of Pook's Hill" as propaganda for the white race, imperialism, and pugnacity. They are, of course, propaganda, but so is "Pilgrim's Progress," and this does not necessarily affect the literary value of the work. As for Thackeray and Meredith, if some moderns have come to disbelieve in the psychological soundness of their social system when applied to an industrialized world, they will nevertheless accept their hypotheses when they read their books, as we all accept the Greek idea of fate and the Greek family conventions when we read the great tragedies. It is the confident assumptions that are significant for this study, and the outstanding fact that the serene trust of those who lived and wrote with a planned and plotted world steady beneath their feet has not survived the new century which began just before the war. Or rather the habit of trust in the old regulations has survived with some and the ability to trust them departed from others: hence our present confusion.

What, for example—to turn toward our own age—is John Galsworthy sure of? His "Forsyte Saga" is essentially a story of changing generations. Soames Forsyte is, so far, its chief figure, and what is Soames but the instinctive Englishman, honest but greedy, predatory, realistic to a degree, not troubling about any morality beyond what expediency calls for, but tenacious of his rights which include the right to live in an orderly, well-behaved London. He is, in fact, the elemental essence from which Kipling's gentleman is built, but more genuine and stronger.

But even Soames' tenacity cannot solve the younger generation. His daughter's idea of right is not his; his son-in-law envies his stoic consistency but does not know how to imitate it. Old England, indeed, seems to be cracking up in the later stories of the Saga; but it is more than England cracking; it is the assumptions upon which men had lived. Even the old men doubt them, and the young are discontentedly seeking for some meaning in life that will make all the energy spent upon it seem worth while.

What is Sinclair Lewis sure of? Of nothing, I should say, except that smallness of soul and pettiness of ambition make a pathetically mean type of man. His Martin Arrowsmith lives as little by the spirit and as much by a code as Kipling's gentleman; but what a difference in the code! The American has no sense of superiority to be established and satisfied, and hence no manners. He lives by ambition solely, and his ambition is to find out something, not for humanity or his class, but because his pride demands that he shall make a great discovery. His universe is no longer a moral one; it does not even concern itself with sexual morality. A wife is a wife as long as she is a good wife, and no longer—that is all there is to the sex question. And the world is neither ordered nor haphazard. It is just *there*, a collection of physical facts which has to be handled in the competition to satisfy both your vanity and your instincts, some of which latter, for inscrutable reasons, are nobly altruistic and others mean or gross. Rawdon Crawley would have been shocked by such an idea of the world; Becky would have triumphed in it and no questions asked; Mowgli would have discovered that the jackals and the banderlog were the *intelligentzia* instead of his class-conscious wolves. This is indeed the World Machine functioning quite impersonally, and the duty of man is to keep it oiled and get out of the way

of the cogs, unless he becomes a cog himself, which is probable. In short, what Lewis accepts without question is pragmatism in its lowest terms of expediency. We are animals adapting ourselves to environment, and the moral credit which lifts us above the animals is attained only by courageously developing the best that happens to be in our nature. Not conformity to code or moral law, but honest, determined self-expression is morality. Babbitt thwarts his own nature, Arrowsmith pluckily carries out his ambitions. By this they are judged.

Sinclair Lewis did not invent this necessity for self-expression. It came to him as freely and as naturally as his native air. His fellow-novelists, both in England and America, assume as he does, though in varying degrees, that success or failure comes not from conformity to well-recognized laws (this was George Eliot's theory) but from honest fidelity to one's instincts and to one's ideals, even when they are conflicting. I say in varying degrees, because some novelists, and some very good ones, are still planted in the nineteenth century, and respond confusedly to the newer attitudes, which they follow subconsciously but do not consciously accept. Sherwood Anderson's rebellious men who pull off the domesticity that incommodes their spirits as a man pulls off a clumsy coat, Christopher Morley's shining women who are hurt and confused by the hungers and denials of the grown-up world, come to no other conclusion whatever their authors may think; Willa Cather's amorous ladies and professors weary of soul are justified in their acts only by the laws of their own nature, which, as well as they can, they obey. In the "Manhattan Transfer" of John Dos Passos, as in Joyce's "Ulysses" and Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway," the thing has gone farther, probably farther than we readers will ever go. In these books there are no assumptions at all, except the



negative assumption of a vast incoherence; there is no more fixity in the moral world than in the physical world of electrons. Behavior is all that counts; indeed, "Manhattan Transfer" is sheer behaviorism, and the characters are little more than habits buffeted by circumstance. By a long circle we have come back to that utter vagrancy which Dante imagined only for his Hell, where the winds of chance blow hither and thither the pathetic lovers, Paolo and Francesca, who cling only to their habit of love.

The writers of the new century who do more than repeat stale phrases of their grandparents have been forced to take what can be called a philosophic attitude, but no such compulsion exists for their readers. It is enough for them if their imaginations warm as they read; they are not responsible to reality as it currently exists. They may read (if they can) Sir Walter Scott with complete sympathy, whereas a writer who wrote Sir Walter Scott in 1926 would be done for. In the daily business of believing, acting, loving, denying, they cannot escape the current philosophy of their times, and they do not: the most hard-shell Fundamentalist fails utterly to conform to all that a literal belief in the Bible implies, fails, not from weakness, as happened with the best of the old puritans, but because he cannot live in this modern world, with its extensions of knowledge far beyond the Hebrew philosophy, without violating a dozen times a day the literalism of his creed. We have yet to hear in the present controversy of Fundamentalist economics, sociology, electrodynamics, sanitation, while the challenge to defend Biblical astronomy has been ignored. But in the reading of books, he who *thinks* like the nineteenth century can be as illogical as he chooses in attacking every manifestation of his own period. If his idea of morality is the same as Thackeray's, then Thackeray will be moral to him and Sinclair Lewis



immoral, without reference to what goes on in his own town. If his ideal of conduct is the same as Kipling's, Anderson will shock him, and it makes little difference that in practice the public-school code of ethics is as foreign to his own customs as the impulses which keep Anderson's men forever running away either from their wives or their mistresses. Scratch any of us and you will find the beliefs, the principles, the prejudices of youth not far beneath the skin, and if these govern our opinions of the new books, there are sure to be some curious reactions.

And this is the reason why the judgments we form of books in a transitional period like this are so confused and confusing (I know that all periods are transitional, but the beginning of a new century, with a world war just behind, is obviously transitional to the *n*th degree). They are confused because the majority of modern books, like the majority of modern men, are a complex of the old world and a new which has not yet clearly defined itself. That complex is the significant item. Ideas that belong to the nineteenth century are interwoven with practical beliefs which are quite alien to them. Mr. Babbitt would find Thackeray's London rather shocking and a little absurd (we can imagine what Thackeray would think of Mr. Babbitt!). The idleness, the hard drinking, the piety, the snobbish worldliness of people who never shook hands with their inferiors would have upset that little gentleman. And yet Babbitt's ideas of God and of conduct in a moral sense are identical in form at least with Dobbin's. Imagine, if you can, the president of an Iowa woman's club in Meredith's county society. How utterly foreign its frank assumption of special privileges for the rich and well-born—or the conviction that women are game and men the hunters—to her experience of democratic feminism. And yet she would be unable to phrase a theory of

sex relationship that differed radically from Meredith's own. Or put one of Kipling's race-conscious gentlemen in American business and let him knock about the natives a little, and see how it works. In books the public-school code is still so familiar as to be sympathetic but in life we have pretty well thrown it over. We have in fact rushed out of the Victorian paradise where a gentleman was a gentleman and one knew where one was, and yet we have brought many conventions and most of our formal thinking through the gates.

Therefore, our judgments of the painting, architecture, music, literature which belongs entirely to this new epoch and no other, are likely to be heterogeneous. H. G. Wells, for example, fills histories with hard, vulgar characters who spend their lives trying to improve education, increase comfort, and provide free and easy love for every one. "Nice" people do not like Mr. Wells, because "nice" people as a rule retain the personal standards of Thackeray or Dickens and prefer that their heroes should have the instincts of a gentleman. Mr. Wells is more honest than they are. He writes upon an assumption which they affect to believe, that the common man must be allowed to grasp the opportunities which science has provided for him. When he grasps them, he may still remain common; Wells cannot help that. Granted this conception of a developing society, and the nature of his characters inevitably follows. Our own Theodore Dreiser is criticized for indecency by the same "nice" people. They fail to see that Dreiser's society is completely equalitarian, a pathetic mass whose instincts were always the same, and whose intelligence approaches nearer and nearer to a level. Codes mean nothing to it, religion is just an emotional charge, those who hold back out of fear do not live at all. It is, indeed, the mass life of the whole, not the character of the indi-

vidual, that makes his story. And, therefore, he describes every phase and characteristic of his animal species, and ignores the differentia that separate the fine man from the plodding beast. It is his fundamental assumptions, so different from Fielding's or Jane Austen's, that account for his ignoring of taste, his distrust of ideals, his minute and tiresome realism. We may not believe in him or like his ideas or his people, but there is no sense in damning him for what is after all a necessity in his scheme.

Of course no society exists in one time only, except among primitive savages. There is usually a confusion of pasts, presents, and futures with every shade and admixture between. Soviet time, for example, is centuries removed from the time of the Russian peasant. In the United States, where there are the vaguest of class lines and where people of every economic and intellectual status read much the same books, the result is particularly disastrous to clear thinking. We need not worry about the Harold Bell Wrights or the Gene Stratton Porters. They exist in past time and their appeal is strictly romantic. No confusion results because no modern ever dreams of applying their fundamental ideas to life. The ultra moderns, too, can take care of themselves. They think they are living in the present when they give us their new moralities and their emancipated individuals. Actually, they are interpreting the present in terms of what they think will be the future and, like all prophets, they must take their chance with events. Shaw was a major prophet in his prime, and must be so acclaimed; but the world did not become precisely Shavian, and will not. The modernists need protection only against misconception. We must not let them shock us by what they write; it is what they think that is important. If we who have a foot in each century wish to bastinado the Lawrences, the Andersons,

the Huxleys, and the O'Neills, let us spank them on the right place, which is upon their fundamental assumptions, if, as is by no means certain in the best cases, these need chastising. But most of our novelists and playwrights and short-story writers, and poets too, are like most of us readers—time with them is compound and complex, and they need protection from the young intellectuals who scorn them because, let us say, marriage is still admired by them, and the old fogies who abuse them if their characters possess a mentality that dates later than 1896.

The real turn of the century was fifteen odd years ago and if it is true, as I think must be evident, that in spite of all lagging, blending, and confusion, there has been a change in fundamental assumptions, then we should begin to call our writers and critics to account. What do our writers believe, if anything? Why don't the critics tell us instead of chattering about manners and too much or too little realism? Even a detective story has some kind of moral basis, which is part of the data for a good judging of it. Literature should not be judged by its morals, but it cannot be understood without them. Admitted that most writers have no beliefs but only a muddle of conventional ideas and native instincts, upon which they sometimes skate very easily. Admitted that even critical readers are as a rule no better off. Admitted that a story may be real when the author's ideas about life are only stale patterns. Nevertheless, good writers believe in something whether they know it or not; they have made a philosophy of life even if they have not rationalized it; they have an instinctive theory of living which checks the moves of every character. Such writers will tell you that their people go their own way. That is not true. They follow, as Colonel Newcome followed, or Tom Jones, a typical path through society, and it was the writer who

created both the society and the path out of his own times *as he conceived them*. A call to accounting in this transitional period would, I think, result in a new criticism. Some readers would be appalled at the implications of the books they were reading, and others disgusted at the stale idea behind so-called "strong" stories. Having begun a literature for a new century, we should begin to criticize it for its basic ideas as well as for the art which cannot be understood without them.

For you, reader, the pertinent question is, are you nineteenth-century, or twentieth, or are you trying vainly to belong to the hypothetical twenty-first? If you are nineteenth, is it from laziness or conviction? Are those indignant judgments you pass upon modernism merely an irritable reaction to change, or are you willing to defend in your own actual living, as well as in your opinions, the values of a passing world? If the one great factor in modern literature, scientific thinking, oppresses you, are you willing to throw overboard all science, or will you try to discriminate between false science and true? Do it, and you may become a different man, at least in criticism.

And if you think you are twentieth-century, what do you mean by that? Do you hold instinctive and inconsistent beliefs (like most of us) and use whichever is convenient at the moment to attack what you dislike or do not understand? It is the duty of a mind in an age of transition to move, either backward or forward, but certainly to move. Are you moving, with some intelligent thought as to where you are going? Or—since this is no sermon—are you following your authors sympathetically in their immensely difficult task of recording change? And if you aspire to be of the twenty-first century—which even if impossible is irresistible to certain types of intellect—are you one who believes that by reducing the universe

to disorder a real triumph can be had over a past that at least was decorously intelligible? Having demolished God and the Unities, and poetic justice and self-control, and (some of you) form and even language itself, are you content to dance on the ruins? Are futurist art and the jargon of Gertrude Stein and the chaotic jumble of a modern city ends in themselves? Or is this just the dizziness of escape and the drunkenness of freedom?

No convinced lover of the past, and no rabid prophet of the future, ever listened to appeals like these. Here we are in the twentieth century, with the nineteenth on our backs and capering like clowns to get rid of it, while the old fellows cry shame on us for our lack of dignity and the youngsters say that we are merely absurd. But there must be some middle-aged moderates to sympathize with the poor Transitionalist. He is trying to hold on to permanent values while they change, like Proteus, into new forms. He is trying to escape from the delusion that convention is truth, while avoiding the illusion that change in itself is a virtue. After all he, and not the shellback or the novelty monger, is the person that counts. He works while the others carp or prophesy. With all confusions it is he who is writing our best books.



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## DIADEMS AND FAGOTS

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To each they offer gifts after his will,  
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.  
I, in my pleachéd garden, watched the pomp,  
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily  
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day  
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,  
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.

WE hear little now of De Quincey's once famous distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, and for an excellent reason. The literature of knowledge has eaten up the literature of power, and is serenely unaware of the prophecy that it was soon to be superseded. "Knowledge is power" is the modern text, and we have put our own definition upon knowledge, as the representative series of books listed below<sup>1</sup> may indicate. Even "literature" nowadays has changed its meaning and signifies anything that is read. Hence I suggest a variant of De Quincey's terminology and shall write of short-sighted and far-sighted literature,

<sup>1</sup> "The How to Succeed in Life Series. In 1000 volumes, including books on psychology, banking, correct English, easy childbirth, practical religion, astrology, the credit system, applied personality, what the well-dressed woman wears, thought culture, prosperity, successful speculation, and character reading; also the best poetry, fiction, drama of the day. The appendix contains the world's best detective stories and the world's best sermons." All publishers.

meaning what he meant, but thinking particularly of our own time. For above the wranglings over estheticisms, romanticisms, and classicisms, monistic, pluralistic, anarchistic, democratic, and aristocratic in literature which engage critics in what often seems a whirl of words, one fact emerges with painful certainty: our literature has become like our life, opportunistic, analytical, short-sighted, and that is a cause of causes for symptoms over which the intellectual have worn out many typewriters without perceptible clarification.

American criticism particularly has become a conflict of personalities, Mr. Mencken against Mr. Babbitt, French ideas versus English, New York against the country. Like their blood brothers, the historians and the psychologists, American critics have tried to isolate literature from life, and make complex laws for phenomena that spring from causes too simple to interest subtle minds overtrained in dialectic and analysis.

The collective books of an age represent no more and probably no less than the collective mind of that period, hence if there is any principle, bias, philosophy, prejudice common to all or most of them, that should be the first object of search for the critic, and until it is found the intellect goes glimmering like an unskilled doctor prescribing (perhaps successfully) for pimples and aches in the joints when the real malady is unknown.

I do not set up for a universal doctor, like those enviable schoolmen of the Middle Ages, who so willingly explained all in the heavens above and the earth beneath, and yet I venture to point to one general characteristic of the books we are reading that seems more basic than the peccadilloes of realism or the question of style. The strong, the well-read, the "typical" books of America (and of Europe, too) are prevailingly books of knowledge, clear-sighted like

knowledge, short-sighted like most knowledge which is not also wisdom. Poets of prophetic and moral strain are modest now and thankful for a thousand readers, preachers are voluble with the overemphasis of the little-heeded; it is the book which tells us what we are like, and why, and what to do about it in order to become more successful, which leads in modern literature.

The ruling passion of this civilization (and please to remember that if I write in large generalities I am thinking concretely in terms of books) is success. The ideal of our ancestors was happiness. By success, I mean an adaptation of the human animal to his immediate environment which will give him an advantage in acquiring what happens to be most desired at the moment, and in being what happens to be most approved. Success is a realizable ideal, for it means having what others have, being what others are, and its key is knowledge. By happiness, I mean a personal sense that the deepest aspirations of the individual have been satisfied. It certainly does not involve success, though it may; it is seldom a realizable ideal, for its key is a control over life quite impossible of mass production. Knowledge helps it a little, but the imagination much more.

The great discovery of this century was that the barriers to success could be thrown down if you only knew enough. With more knowledge of agriculture the food supply could be readily increased. With a knowledge of credit wealth could be made to breed for many if not all. With a sounder comprehension of psychology man could be taught to use his brain properly instead of improperly. With a deeper knowledge of physics and chemistry our earthy environment could be changed from static to dynamic, space could be narrowed, time crowded with events, and labor given a leverage upon production.

Books throughout this century show a growing obsession with the knowledge that could accomplish all these things. Plato, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare look across the ages, but the typical twentieth century book is concerned with here and now. It is saturated with the spirit of science—let us know the truth—but innocent of the further assumption that the truth will make us free. Not freedom, not happiness, not the wisdom which tells how to live, is the concern of our modern books, whether they crudely deal with the factors of success, or subtly contribute to our knowledge of the causes of failure. Why should these aspirations burden modern minds since we all believe that to master our physical environment guarantees success, and that success is an end in itself!

Was there ever a civilization so little concerned with how to live? We preach of it, naturally, but in phrases often meaningless because they are drawn from books that express sets of ideas now archaic in practice. The university today is powerful beyond all comparison in teaching measurement—which is science—and weak beyond comparison in stirring more than faint queries as to what shall be done with success when we have it. Only a few rebels ask in terms that are really searching where our strenuous industrial developments lead, or what Standard Oil or United States Steel can do for ultimate happiness. To question the relative value, say of preventive medicine, where no thought extends beyond the preservation of efficient workers able to run machines, seems absurd because the question is completely outside our habit of mind. We are intoxicated by our success in controlling nature and energizing the brain. And what drunkard cared for the morrow! Our major effort is toward immediate success in the use of tools, particularly that great tool, the body. The minority that still thinks in terms of happiness, that would

speculate in beauty, or rest in spiritual content, taking those satisfactions not to be gained by mastery of the object, which by age-long proof are indispensable to human nature, has the psychology of a minority. Poets are lyric not epic, analytical not synthetic, moralists perfunctory, except in diagnosis, philosophers either merely descriptive or grumbling voices heard only by the discontent. Mr. Durant makes philosophy popular by turning it into biography and explanation. No fire spreads from his book as from Emerson or Goethe. It is a text-book of useful knowledge which teaches how to understand what philosophers have thought. The reader is more knowing for having read it—but quite untouched by the need of a philosophy of his own. Only unsuccessful people need philosophies and we propose to be successful!

The Sunday newspaper, as others have doubtless remarked before, is a complete simulacrum of the age—astoundingly efficient and effective, an encyclopedia of everything that happened last week, our complete substitute for meditation upon the way of life. From a Sunday newspaper our civilization could be reconstructed—a little sketchy as to facts, but entirely indicative of the kind of knowledge we regard as sufficient. Indeed the Sunday newspaper is our one complete intellectual achievement, containing by description or implication everything else. A million words on keeping up with living—and next to nothing pertinent or powerful on what the devil we are going to do with all this acceleration of the means of life.

I am not a medievalist (which is one of the diseases with which this era of knowledge is infecting our finer spirits), I am not even a rebel against this age, although I should welcome a few fanatics who could stir up thinking. Culture, as is evident, has always developed by the

trial and error method, which means an overemphasis upon successful experiments. Scientists so long as they remained philosophers never learned to measure with that inhuman concentration upon mere things which has given them their present success. Democracy would never have got so far along the road if good minds had not set themselves the task of distributing the knowledge that enabled the peasant to use his mind as a tool. If we are all to live together in Babylonian movie palaces, which seems to be the collective ideal of the nineteen twenties, the magical secrets of how to succeed in business, how to express the personality in clothes, how to seem educated, and even civilized, with the minimum of energy diverted from money making, must be made accessible. A society based upon credit and supported by a neck-and-neck race between production and consumption must be informed as to the terms of its subsistence. For society must certainly stay alive, whether it knows how to live or not.

Therefore this overemphasis upon knowledge about things is clear-sighted even if it is short-sighted. We are overemphasizing success no more than the Middle Ages overemphasized hope, and the Renaissance joy. We may long for Platoes and Goethes, but certainly do not crave Elizabethan sanitation, spinning wheels, or buggies. We may not be enamored of subways, tariff millionaires, tabloids, or neurotic women, but they are by-products of the same overemphasis that has made the world an economic unit, conquered some disease, and abolished much poverty.

And yet poverty of mind is not being abolished, nor aimlessness abated, nor philosophic vision increased. It is natural, I suppose, and yet deplorable, that our literature, which is not bound to hunger, vanity, and fear, not even to success, should be dazzled, cribbed, and cabined by the triumph of knowledge over the imagination.



Consider with a brooding mind the list of hypothetical books with which this essay began, adding such examples as you choose from your own shelves, not neglecting belles lettres.

Note that in our day most of the best poetry is analytical and ironic. Frustrate man, the end product of success, is the theme of T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, A. E. Housman, Edgar Lee Masters, Humbert Wolfe, Edwin Arlington Robinson. We read them to learn more of the imaginative mind under stress of inhibited desires. Or if not frustrate man, then the singer searches a mode of life in sharp retreat from the industrialized world—Frost in New England, Housman in the neo-paganism of Shropshire. Either poetry bows to the modern need for more knowledge of the creature man, or it is a literature of the minority, not in strong rebellion against short-sighted success, like Whitman, Browning, Emerson, but plaintive, esoteric, and expecting no world acceptance. Read Emerson's essay on The Poet and see how our banners are lowered and our drums muffled since our leaders lost interest in how to live. The beautiful life is now a solace for the defeated, a vision too ethereal for the gross uses of earth. It is when the poet reveals new aspects of the mind (as William Ellery Leonard, or Hardy, or Masters) and thus contributes to scientific knowledge that he is most in tune with prevailing interests.

More striking is the example of fiction, the true mirror of this age. Mystery stories, romances of adventure, historical romances are only more lengths in a continuing tradition, and prove nothing except a desire to dream awake which exists presumably even in Paradise. Romance can be used for great ends, but has not so been used in this age. Strong writers have gone in for facts. They have told to the democracy the truth about ordinary un-

heroic man. They have followed the psychologist in tracking pathology to where it lies curled in the heart of the normal. They have exposed the barrenness of farm life, the vapidness of the half-educated, the tyrannies of sex, the anarchies of a know-nothing philosophy, the slow effects (as in Galsworthy) of a loosening grip upon the conduct of life. It is easy to fit titles to these descriptions.

The novelists have trotted behind the steam calliope of experimental science. They have set up their laboratories in the spirit, their controlled experiments, their analysis of things as they are, or seem. This is the effect upon the artistic temperament of a drive for efficiency—it pretends, like a sensitive child, to be scientific too. This is the root of realism and the cause of naturalism. Tell us, we ask of the novelists and dramatists, what we are like, in terms that our imagination can understand, so that we may get knowledge from our reading, and learn to control the circumstances which so inexplicably interfere with our success. Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, Joyce and May Sinclair, are read, like the tracts of the early nineteenth century, for their information. "Why Men Fail" is the title of a psychological disquisition and "Elmer Gantry" the name of a novel, but the two books belong to the same philosophical category.

The novels that are discussed and taken seriously as exponents of the group mind are therefore likely to be textbooks dressed in narrative form. They can be listed under heads—as "pioneer life," "intellectual life in New York," "expatriates," "the young girl and obstetrics," "sex appeal and what happens," "strong bodies and weak wills," "dis-integrated personalities," "the unconscious versus the conscious." To call all this realism is just a means of classification for esthetic analysis, and is very likely to identify these modern social studies with books where the facts

were a means not an end. The true description goes much deeper. These are books of knowledge not of imagination, literature where the vision is short though terribly clear, books that tell what living is as a contribution to the escape from failure or as a guarantee of success. They are "true stories" read by collectors of facts.

But what the belles lettrists do half-heartedly and with constant aberrations toward imaginative creation of life ideally considered, the writers of the "How to Succeed" library do without mental reservation. Their quite unliterary books boldly confess what modern literature is about. The "key books" of this age are practical psychologies, the manuals of health for everybody, the guides to successful behavior which crudely expose our beliefs and our desires. A philosophic critic of a later century will say that this generation was persuaded that by taking thought it could add a cubit to its stature, and often did so, but as to what good the cubit did there was seemingly no concern. He will say, this was an age of measurement—expand the dollar, shorten glands, adjust environment, lengthen life, weigh illusions, study mankind with all the instruments of precision which Pope lacked; in this age they believed that with enough knowledge success was certain, or if not success, insight into the causes of failure. Art therefore was sterile except where it contributed to fact.

Readers of this attempted survey may think that it is too sweeping. They will cite H. G. Wells, saying that there is a typical modern author, all of whose books are written on the one theme of how to live. I answer that no better example than H. G. Wells could be found for my thesis, since here is a writer trained in science, as all literate authors of the immediate future are likely to be, who, thanks to his early baptism in the religion of science,

has already lost his awe of new facts and realized that knowledge alone is not going to be enough. But observe that his ideas on how to live are all conditioned by the popular assumption of the age that once man is efficient he will be happy. In every one of Wells's serious books some simple rule of sociology, hygiene, or politics creates the possibility of a Utopia which, incidentally, always has a cockney look and smell to it. Having learned measurement, Wells thinks that by applying measurement we may be saved. He is plucky, and relatively far-sighted, but a little naïve.

More cogent is the objection that authors by hundreds are protesting against the ideal of success, even when they are most pertinent examples of its insidious influences. This is true. The poets, novelists, and dramatists, with the less fashionable clergy, have always filled the front benches of the opposition, yet never, it seems to me, have they been less effective than now. If we forget the Elmer Gantrys of religion, the clergy may be said to be against mere knowledge to a man, but they play from weakness not from strength, they speak with the hollow voice of the radio preacher who knows that tens of thousands will cut him off at the third platitude. The writers are in like case. They are strong when they contribute to knowledge, weak when they transcend it.

These statements are made by way of definition since my purpose is not to condemn books which, measured by standards of pure art, may very justly be said to reflect and interpret the spirit of an age. And yet it is easy to pass on to criticism if one considers the kind of life they serve and represent. Has American life, for instance, grown less aimless anywhere, anyhow, except in the increase of material efficiency? Are there half as many of a growing population concerned with what they will do

with success when they get it, as in, let us say, the generation of Emerson? Is one-tenth, or one-hundredth as much intellect devoted to the use of wealth, the conduct of life, the cravings of a civilized mind for order, discipline, beauty, content, as to the control of machinery, the increase of production, the comfort of body? The answers, of course, are obvious, and so long as they are obvious the fact that literature follows instead of leads may be natural, but is not a subject for congratulation—no matter how subtle the analysis, how “true” the representations of the strains and stresses of industrialism. As long as we define success in terms of the control of nature, and worship the machine, so long will the “How to Succeed Series” dominate the publishers’ lists.

The truth is that the imagination has lost its grip. Those who serve it in art and religion are dazed, like the rest of us, by the immense success of the measurers, who by exploding a liquid change the transportation habits of mankind, or with a dose of bacteria make two grains of wheat grow where one grew before. We are much too busy capitalizing our physical gains to worry about the break-down of morale, the increase of neuroticism, the vulgarizing of public life. That is probably just what the active worker in the machine age should be doing. If he worries, it will probably be about the wrong thing. And it is not fantastic to suppose that he may lose interest in physics, chemistry, medicine, finance, and government at the very moment when they are most needed to support the decaying initiative of too much coddled man. But it is the business of the creative writers to look ahead, and they have had bundles of hay dropped under their noses. A million facts in sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology have been slung in their direction to be analyzed and digested into



literature. The gleaners that follow a reaper and binder have no time to look beyond the end of the field.

In short, literature is subservient as seldom before in history, and efficient knowledge is its watchword quite as much as the factory manager's. Do the book and never consider whether it is worth the doing. Art for science's sake. Let all writing become journalism and tell the world what happened last week. This is the creed of the best read authors of the twentieth century and whatever their achievement, this achievement is limited by the scope of their ideal.

And yet the desire to ask what comes next is irresistible. What is the final answer to mass production and mass consumption? How is happiness bred and how conserved? What does it profit a man if he can control economics, enforce prohibition, abolish illiteracy, and yet cannot satisfy himself? In the past we have gone to the poets and to the religious for answers—partial to be sure but yet not disproved. Has all the imagination gone into science that we must be content with statistics for our answers now? The omniscient Victorians who preached with such confident audacity ends and means of good living, while science was quietly digging pits under their feet, are treated now with a mixture of admiration and ridicule. No wonder Carlyle was bilious and Tennyson took to port. But the grandchildren of the Victorians are so afraid of being wrong in any speculative matter that they dare not open their mouths in protest against the machine that gives them bread. The Delphic oracle has become a laboratory, Apollo a phonograph, and the Muses are busy studying sex and neuroticism. Morality is a theme for the ignorant, and the literature of protest is written by obscurantists and those who should have been



long since dead. The literary mind has gained in skill and prudence, lost in energy and courage. The salt has been told that it is only sodium chloride and has promptly lost its savor. Bankers, manufacturers, and engineers have usurped a creative leadership which belongs to education, morality, and art. And it will take as good men as they are to get it back.

As good men, who are not despisers of their own times, not stupidly ignorant of the results of measurement, but devoting strong imagination to a way of life that leads toward spiritual content. Modern literature emphatically is not so interested, as its obsession with scientific analysis abundantly proves. For let the apple roll as far as it may, it still sheweth the tree from which it comes.

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## QUAKERS AND PURITANS

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IT is the fashion to say that world history, European history, most of all American history is being rewritten. It is not so much being rewritten as reinterpreted. Although the new willingness to be interesting has given style again some of its old importance, and the innumerable facts which research has discovered in the past half century have revised many a conclusion, neither circumstance in itself is so important as our changed attitude toward desired truth. We have more information about the past, and of late the record has been more acceptably written, yet the essential change is in the theory of living according to which facts are arranged and words chosen to present them, and this theory depends upon the special interests of our age. Indeed one can say with little exaggeration that our interest has created the new facts by drawing them from the obscurity in which nine-tenths of the past must always lie, and that those curious in mental processes may well find what we in our time wish to know about history more significant than what we have discovered in the tombs of the Egyptians or the records of the American pioneers. For we seek neither with the Middle Ages a record of God's dealings with men, nor with the eighteenth century a political philosophy, but instead evidence which will help us to apprehend what

we regard as the most important aspect of human life: the developing power of man over nature and his own mental processes, and proof from any era that the mind and its body progress, or regress, and why. The fifth century in Rome, the twelfth in France, and the Puritan era in America all interest us for reasons that would not have strongly held the actors in those periods. Augustine, we imagine, would have read Gibbon with disdain. Abelard surely would regard H. G. Wells across the ages with something like contempt, and Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather declare in their heaven of the elect that our discussions of Puritanism are irrelevant if not stupidly ignorant of the vital needs of humanity.

Right or wrong, we pursue our own interests, but are not thereby permitted to vilify or misunderstand our ancestors whose motives differed so sharply from ours. Books like Mr. Murdock's life of Increase Mather and Miss Best's study of Quaker saints, are therefore welcome because they are in effect explanations of strong and ancient forces persistently uncomprehended by the very civilization they still mold and shape.

The Puritan influence came from emigrants who took with them the bone and sinew of British individualism in religion and education. Their descendants, who gave the United States its most characteristic mental habit, have been misconceived both by the great New Englanders, Hawthorne and Emerson, and by the anti-Puritans of our day. All have sought in them what they wished to find. The Quakers, possessors of a set of ideals and a practice of living each more perfectly realized than any other doctrine or ethics that came to America, have been neglected as a shaping force. And yet the ten generations since the Puritan beginnings or the eight since the friendly impact of the Quakers are a tiny span in history, even in a packed

history like that of the United States. Their mental habits and ideals are stronger in the American mind today than anything else that has been brought overseas and only to be equaled by the effect of the native environment itself.

Mr. Murdock is more interested in a reputation than in influences. His scholarly treatise is a well documented history of a typical Puritan who was second only to Edwards in power of the intellect, and to none in his public relations with his narrow but fecund epoch in New England. The author's purpose is to justify Increase according to the Mathers' own lights, and thus demolish the legends of superstition, self-seeking, sourness, and obscurantism that cling about the tormentors of witches and makers of gloom for later America. His book, otherwise satisfying, suffers from this avowed purpose; he has indeed proved too much. The tension of the Puritan mind is explained, but the tension remains, a force that made great men great though unlovely, but drove lesser human nature toward hypocrisy and hysteria. The argument which clears the Calvinist because he was a good Calvinist, would excuse Torquemada for his consistency in upholding the Inquisition.

He does not make Increase and the great divines of his period more lovable, but he supplies well-ordered evidence for a conclusion which is really more important. He depicts a typical leader of seventeenth century New England who, whether in the English court or at home in Boston, was to be compared in intellectual stature and relative influence to any man of his era, and his book will help to confirm an estimate of Puritan New England not as a sour and wrangling community of cantankerous pioneers (which was sometimes nevertheless a good description) but as one of those communities like Florence of the quattrocento where, in small compass, responsibility, genius,

energy developed in a remarkable degree and made a print upon history far sharper and deeper than might be expected of so small and struggling a state.

The key to the problem is the quality of the Puritan leader as an intellectual, in the sense in which we use that significant word. The New Englanders in general were picked men, as is shown by the prepotence of their heredity, but more significant for the dominance of the Puritan habit of mind was the status of the clergy who came with them or were chosen and educated on this soil. They were not only thinkers of unusual energy, but they functioned under conditions likely to give even inferior intellects the greatest of opportunities. Men like the three Mathers, like Davenport, like Edwards, were not of course inferior in any sense. All of them came into active rivalry with statesmen, soldiers, above all intellectuals, both at home and in the great world overseas, and it is doubtful whether their superiors in native intelligence and acquired ability were alive in their times. Increase gained the respect of Cromwell and two English kings, Edwards in his "Freedom of the Will" displayed a power in pure metaphysics not exceeded since. But if they had been lesser men their position as leaders in a theocracy with as much civil power as moral, and as much dominance by character as by doctrine, would have assured them an influence in their country to be measured only by generations. For in the rough world of early New England, where there was plenty of drunkenness, lechery, worldly self-seeking, and unspiritual grabbing of land and power, the clerical ideals were nevertheless dominant, and the majority, whatever their practice, honestly believed that the will of God as their leaders taught it was more important than trade balances or the acreage annually cleared.

The New England theocracy failed, as was to be ex-

pected. The idea of a God's experiment in a new England where all conditions should favor the elect and success be measured by perfection vigorously interpreted, was doomed in birth. It was not predestined to failure because human nature could never survive such a test. Who knows that it cannot? It failed for the deeper reason that the test itself was faulty. Real saints from the Quaker fold, gentle and liberal natures like Roger Williams, lovers of the Lord, who, like Vaughn or Herbert, adored him in the Arminian fashion, were, according to its stern tenets, more dangerous to a logical and unalterable orthodoxy than debauched Indian traders or profit-seeking Yankees who gave only lip service to the Puritan Jehovah.

It failed, casting a premonitory gloom over the last days of Increase Mather, stirring Cotton Mather's petulant femininity to incredible exertions, and rousing Edwards to the height of his great and hopeless arguments for a fatalistic creed that in spite of him could not stand prosperity or endure the relaxations of common sense. But the decay of God's New England was only the beginning of the story.

Five generations of intellectual leaders had insisted upon the will to perfection and imposed a doctrine of never-relaxing strain upon New England and the colonies of New England spread from Charleston to the beginning of the new West. They put an emphasis upon willing, and planted in the most obdurate consciousness the idea that man must hourly strive for improvement. According to the doctrine, it was only thus that men could discover whether they were of the elect, but in the subconsciousness of the Puritan descendant this became not so much a doctrine as a mental habit of moral strenuosity.

I do not refer to the will to reform, although that of course ran with the other. The will to make others good



so evident throughout American social history is a concomitant of individualism in religion. If I, rather than Holy Church, am responsible for morality, then I must see to it that my brother behaves himself. But reform, as we have it, is more humanitarian than specifically Puritan. Increase Mather and his kind legislated for the will of God not for ethics; the point with them was not whether society behaved itself for prosperity's sake, but whether man was freed of his passions to devote his whole attention to the commands of God. Drunkenness was wicked, not because it degenerated but because it interrupted the concerns of the soul. Good liquor strengthened the elect, and was therefore praiseworthy; excessive mirth in a teetotaler was more dangerous than rum soberly administered since levity hid from man the sternness of his God. Increase would have heartily approved the political methods of the Anti-Saloon League and violently attacked their humanitarianism as tending to advance the damnable theory that comfort, prosperity, health, good morals had any value in themselves if not a function of the soul's complete election to salvation. A dozen Puritan divines today of the old stamp and old power would blow the Eighteenth Amendment to flinders in a generation—and probably give us something worse.

It is, indeed, not the ethical formula for making everybody good that is the chief legacy of the Puritans, nor, except in weak forms, their dominant fear of the passions. Nor is it their anti-estheticism, for in that, if they were blind to color and deaf to music, their intellectual sense of proportion, their appreciation of decorous beauty, is manifest in their furniture, their houses, and most of all in the exquisite order of such of their villages as we have not yet destroyed. Nor have the ideas, which intellectuals usually leave behind them, in this case survived in any

consistency. No, it is a mental habit which New England chiefly gave to the United States, a deep-lying will to achieve and accomplish, essential at first to all Calvinists who could never know whether they were of the elect or the damned unless they strove unendingly, and in the decline of Calvinism become a will to succeed in any fashion, not to lie down and take one's ease, not to be content with what one was or had, never to cease trying to rise in the scale, which in a hundred forms, many degenerate, some admirable, is a part of American strenuosity throughout history. The aim was lost or transmuted, the will, the habit, the custom of energy remained.

That the influence of a pioneer environment with its obstacles which had to be overcome was great in this, I of course do not deny, and that boundless opportunity in the same environment also called forth the will is obvious. Nor do I forget the later Scotch-Irish whose equivalent doctrine had like effects. Climate too has been a factor, yet the more carefully one studies American literature, religion, and social history, the more evident and the more continuous does this mental habit appear. And in both its ethical and unethical forms—whether in the reforming clergyman, the tireless organizer of business, or the American undergraduate strenuous beyond comparison in the pursuit of his own ideals—it is essentially Puritan (as Keyserling incidentally has stated) and specifically in America owes its strongest impulses and immediate origin to the leaders of New England thought who were the strongest moral and intellectual force in our early history. We have lost, or denied, the ends they sought. We have substituted control of nature or of other men for the will of God as they interpreted it, but in accordance with familiar psychological laws, the mind has kept the direction they gave. There are no Puritans alive today except in phases so pal-

lid that the seventeenth century brethren would have cast them out. Billy Sunday would have been whipped in New England, and the present Methodist leaders confounded in doctrine and convicted of heresy. The research scientist, inflexibly bending his whole energy to making man's knowledge conform to a nature with whose secrets he wrestles, is the nearest counterpart to the Mathers (who themselves were far more scientific than literary). And the scientist, though he lacks the moral fervor and breadth of purpose of the Puritan, is our strongest intellectual influence now, as they were then. Let us hope that he will not become equally besotted. But in any case, the Puritan habit of mind is still ours, and we are not likely soon to escape it.

Miss Best's "Rebel Saints" reveals what the Quaker influence upon so much that we essentially are has come to in the general memory. She writes brief biographical essays about men and women familiar to those born Quakers, or to readers of Sewel's History, or to students of religion—Mary Dyer, Elizabeth Katherine Evans, famous in Malta, Mary Fisher who invaded the "Holy Land of New England" and the camp of the Sultan, the astonishing sailor, Thomas Lurting, and, of course, William Penn, and that most satisfactory of modern messiahs, George Fox. But it is necessary that she should write of them aggressively, stressing their militant radicalism, their fire, their youth, their great program of universal communion with the best of the inner nature of man, in order that she may cancel in the minds of her readers the common idea of the Quaker as a peace-at-any-price man who believed that plain clothes and nonresistance made religion.

Her heroes were the real fighting Quakers in contradistinction to those commonly so called who lacked the

courage of their convictions and chose in time of warfare the easier way. These real Quakers were bold beyond the experience of their times, more daring than the most daring pioneers, more reasonable, more far-seeing, more resolute in their insistence that man must rely upon the God within him, than the Puritans in their determination that he must serve God according to formula.

The Quakers of her book are the founders, and though so deeply influential in America were not, except incidentally, Americans. We recognize, of course, some aspects of their influence. We know that Penn's state was the first model of a liberal government, and far closer in ideals and practice to our United States than was the Puritan theocracy. But it is too commonly supposed that essential Quakerism was lost in the rigidity which strangled the Friends in the eighteenth century and changed a world-wide enthusiasm into a prosperous sect. This is not true. The seed of the Quakers was sowed as widely if less deeply than the mental habits of the Puritans. The Quakers, while their energy lasted, permeated every corner of the infant country. New Englanders carried their strenuous but decaying doctrine with them as they emigrated westward to improve their economic status, but the Quakers on their first flood went far and wide as missionaries preaching the inner light. See Woolman's Journal as one of many testimonies. They too, in rapid expansion, became part of every American community, influencing it by example which is always stronger than doctrine, generally liked and always respected, where the Yankees outside of New England were generally disliked and often feared.

Indeed, one need not fear over-statement in saying that the fundamental qualities of what can properly be called the American brand of idealism are essentially Quaker in

character, and very largely Quaker in origin. Tolerance, respect for man as man, spiritual equality, impatience with outward forms, dislike of violence as a means of settling disputes, belief in the essential goodness of human nature, even of foreign human nature, self-dependence in religion, humanitarianism whether to prisoners, animals, or slaves: I do not mean, of course, to say that American history has been based upon these principles, but that they have been constantly felt, constantly urged by the majority of Americans susceptible to ideals at all, can certainly be amply demonstrated. And these, if they are Christian principles in general, are Quaker principles in particular, are indeed the very principles which in the sectarian age of violence, privilege, intolerance, plain men and women by the hundreds of thousands paid for with their property, their liberty, or their lives. George Fox's diary is as much more modern in the principles advanced and the ideas included as it is more Christian in the primitive sense than Cotton Mather's "Magnalia" or the tenets of Archbishop Laud.

Yet the Quaker has failed of that eminence of praise and abuse which the Puritan has so emphatically gained in American history. He has lacked a literature to preserve and commemorate him. The weakness of Quakerism was its deficiency in intellectual fiber. It depended upon insight, which babes and sucklings might possess when scholars were blinded by their own vanities. Hence it bred saints but not intellectuals. So long as the spiritual fires burned bright, miracles were accomplished. But when the blaze subsided the ardor slackened, and to keep alive the vigor of the sect there was no such mental discipline as Calvinism required. The Quakers founded the best of elementary schools, but only late and slow did they come to higher education. They did not train intellectual leaders



because they did not need intellectual leaders, whereas in the Puritan theocracy these were essential; and hence there was no such transmutation possible from the needs of the church to the needs of the state as made New England the nursery of intellect for the nation.

And for this reason and perhaps also because of the essential humility of the good Friend, the idealism of the Quakers passed into the national consciousness and lost its marks of origin while the sour reforming habit of the Puritans and their insistence upon will was carried with them, and often under their name, into later history. That Quakerism grew flabby, even as Puritanism grew aimless, is evident. The degeneration of the fine philosophy of the Friends into general amiability and ineffective gestures against violence was not without its effect upon American conduct in 1914, and the quietism of thrifty common sense which is the last stage of tolerance and plain living has made Penn's Pennsylvania prosperous and heavy-minded. Yet in essential principles, in mental attitudes, in religious ideas there is more vital Quakerism than genuine Puritanism in America today, with the single exception of that belief spread so widely by New Englanders throughout the Middle West, that virtue can and should be legislated upon the minds of fellow men.

Can we get back the full vigor and single-minded direction of the Puritan intellectuals without becoming once more dogmatic and stretching our minds again upon the logical outline of self-sufficing creed? This is the essential problem of American education and is recognized as such by every leader whose words are worth regarding.

Can we revive essential Quakerism with its spiritual fire, its passionate belief in the possible goodness of every man, its willingness to forego privilege if the community can become friends in the sight of God, its insistence upon



the greater reality of the inner life?—can all this be revived in prosperity, with the conquest of nature held forth as the greatest good, and a cynical will to power tacitly accepted? Can success be given to the Quaker's idea in environments richer, subtler, more powerful than his? That has been for a century, and still is, the vital theme of American literature, from Emerson and Cooper (who were both half Quaker), Thoreau, Whitman, down to Willa Cather, Robert Frost, and Sherwood Anderson.

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## TOO SOON—AND TOO LATE

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THERE is an insidious temptation to be always making great things of small, to deduce nations from little books and races from the words they use. The temptation should be resisted when the impulse to explain everything quickly and neatly is strong; it should be yielded to with passion when there is hope of solving, not a world problem, but the enigma of a man or a book. In criticism, much must often be attempted if a little is to be achieved. The deadness of much scientific—and much esthetic—criticism of literature results from its very narrowness. An acre is cleared complete of its jungle, but the jungle of human mystery crowds back. We have learned the order of Shakespeare's plays, whence Milton drew his mythology, and what sickness grasped the mind of Poe; we have learned, what have we learned?

I have been reading the short stories of the American, Joseph Hergesheimer, called "Quiet Cities," and the short stories of the Englishman, D. H. Lawrence, called "The Woman Who Rode Away." They are not ordinary books, or ordinary men. Hergesheimer is too idiosyncratic to be a symbol of his America—what strong writer ever is truly representative of his nation?—and Lawrence is too much Lawrence to be a voice for England. And yet these books could come, each of them, only out of their

characteristic social environments. One learns from them something as to what we are on this side of the Atlantic, and something that is stirring deeply in the soil of the other side, and if this learning is a by-product, the books are not less revealing because of an attempt to make of them a lesson in national cultures. Not far enough—too far, is the motto I should choose for them, an epigram of both social and literary implication.

They are books of nostalgia. Hergesheimer is an antiquary with an artist's brooding consciousness of the beautiful vitality of things completed because they are past. His book of nine stories is a museum of the new style made fashionable by the American wing of the Metropolitan, where, with meticulous accuracy and an equal care for the continuity of life, he assembles a stage scene, dresses his characters, prepares their dialogue, supplies credible motives, and directs the piece with a skill that makes his imagined history as realistic as modern acting and as suggestive as a setting by Gordon Craig. Albany, Charleston, Natchez, Boston, Lexington, Pittsburgh—the romanticists of the 'nineties who wrote of these places in historical perspective were children beside Hergesheimer. Their sets were like the back drops and wings of "East Lynne" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," their characters spoke melodrama, their plots were borrowed from Scott, Dumas, or the *Chanson de Roland*. They did not love the past; it was only an excuse for romanticizing. They were not really curious as to life—a pageant rose-lit sufficed for them, and one romantic Colony was like another.

But Hergesheimer, the deftest restorer of antiques in our time, has that creative curiosity which amounts to passion. His fiction is like his house in West Chester to which he so often and so lovingly refers; a place for collections, not dusty, musty, but restored to shininess, grouped as in

life, touched with imagination, until the companies of youth paddle out from Albany to the Spring wooing on the islands, the squaw fills the pipe for old Thomas Armit and touches a coal to the tobacco, the pages of St. Philip's register flutter under Colonel Fearn's hand, Lafayette flushes beneath his red hair, tight-lipped Boston merchants remember dancing naked on the sands of the Marquesas, feudalism's last glow hangs over plantation life, scalps are taken, democracy is a religion, eyes are gouged.

And yet there is something childish, too, in Hergesheimer. He is like Mr. Ford who makes all the roads of the world to run together, and then buys an inn, a fiddler, and a horse car. Fascinating these stories are, but it is a fascination of the sense, and a tickling of the intellect. Indeed they, and the life they pretend to recreate, are as decorated as a Ziegfeld show and as simple. The simplest emotions suffice, the most obvious reactions. Indeed it is not human character, as such, that interests the author, but only human character under conditions that are different and more desirable than our own. He does not tell us more of life, but only more of life as it was in a past that seems to his nostalgic imagination more vivid and more livable than the industrial present. Like the oldest romancers, he sings the deeds of ancients who were men like ourselves, but greater because they had more to do, more to see, more to overcome. His heroes, truly, are not men and women at all, but the shimmering Mississippi, the dreamy wharves of Charleston, the Kittatinny trace, Natchez glamorous on its bluff, the interior of a Colonial house. He is a phase, a symptom of a civilization getting older, moving faster, losing youth before energy, recalling hot blood, quick acts, rich scenes, lost opportunities—the reverse of philosophy, the reverse of real introspection. Retrospective romance, conducted in a

fashion worthy of a country which now can master any technique—that is Hergesheimer.

The book of D. H. Lawrence is like a reptile house in a sophisticated Zoölogical Garden, where amongst natural backgrounds strange, unexpected creatures, often horrible, crawl and twine, emerging a slimy length from a patch of innocent grass, a scaly, sinuous body above the dimpling of a flowered pool. They are all alike in that they come from some earlier age of the world, all of them instincts winding blindly up through use and wont, all reptiles, though so different in appearance; yet it is as hard to make precise their forms as it is easy to picture Hergesheimer's costumed past. The story always lies beneath the words—sometimes more obvious than the words themselves, sometimes elusive and incomplete. That unhappy wife who wearies of her respectability in a society organized for women—something in her breast carries her off to the hidden Mexican village where maleness still dominates and a woman is still a creature of prostration and sacrifice. The pale London intellectual grasped by that hard miner's wife in the North, how his brittle ideas crackle when her sex need clutches him; how that other poor dilettante actually dies of reality when his unsatisfied wife calls back her dead and vigorous lover; and there is the man who loved islands, who shut himself from his world to be happy, and was eaten by the costliness of nature, seized, unprotected, by the loosened instinct of sex, killed by the elements themselves when he ran at last from his kind altogether!

Lawrence is no antiquary, not even a collector. He puts his discoveries in a museum, as science does, not for love, but for revelation. Beside his primitive instincts revealing themselves, beside his shrill thesis that the maleness is going out of man and the ancient dark forces are reveng-

ing his sterility, Hergesheimer's century-old antiques seem toys, like a wax-works show set up outside of Stonehenge or an exhibition of laces in the pictured cave of Nuyaux.

Lawrence's nostalgia is for something beyond civilization. His curiosity is not for deeds, opportunities, sights, smells, lovely sounds, but for the inner darkness of the mind itself, the nucleus which resists while civilization builds a dancing impermanent shell around the atom. He is the sunflower weary of time.

And Lawrence as a literary artist belongs in an England and in a Europe that has grown out of enthusiasm for itself, that no longer so much as desires to recover its unreflective and sensational youth, but is beginning to experiment with new forms of character, new attitudes, and a new soul. The British Labor Party seems—and is—a far cry, but its concern with a different kind of living is as un-American as Lawrence. Russia has subtle resemblances. There is no health in what we have recently been, is the Russian thought, short-sighted perhaps, and as neurotic as Hergesheimer is naïve. It is too soon for Americans to feel that way—too late for Europe to be confident of her present energies, nostalgic only for an historic past. The maleness, as Lawrence in his queer pathologic way puts it, has gone out of her. She must seek the dark forces. America may be sexless, but not unsexed. An American may desire to be a century younger, but it is the middle-aged man's pleasant sense of the virility he once could waste.

I wish that Hergesheimer might have written some of these Lawrentian stories. How he would have made that templed Mexican village glow and reproduce its visible image. But it is impossible. For him, the woman would have meant adventure. The deep churning forces of sex obscurely uniting themselves with the struggles of man-



kind to restore the hot heat of the sun and make man virile again, are as outside of his wish as his power. If Lawrence is febrile, Hergesheimer is dormant, and is no more concerned with such dark matters than the plumber in his motor with proletarian needs. And in return, how Lawrence would have written the story of voodooed Charleston, of that octoroon glamorous with naked fires, the debasing negro magic that poisons the white mind! Hergesheimer plays with the theme as a white boy might play with a Hopi rattlesnake, aware of its deadly beauty, innocent of its symbolism. But Lawrence would have quite lost Charleston itself. Dreamy, human beauty, savoring of content, good manners, pleasant acts, men and women with leisure to be merely charming, merely good—that is outside of his sympathy and perhaps of his understanding. His stories lie in the cypress swamps of ruined souls.

Of course it is absurd to let these two men, and particularly Lawrence, serve as exponents of their national cultures. That is to simplify too much. And yet they are magnificently revealing, even to their style. The rather harsh, repetitive style of Hergesheimer, with its infinity of pasted-on detail, and its sudden lucidities where the imagination fuses his antiquities into a living, expressive past, is characteristic of a people still becoming, still experimenting, still believing that skill can accomplish anything. Whereas Lawrence's sinuous reptilian grace has the half contemptuous beauty of a medium so mastered that its unimportance is evident save as an end. Hergesheimer is effort: Lawrence weariness.

If they could collaborate! But there is a century between! And somewhere halfway in that century, the American craving for more spirit, more knowledge of the inner life that the Civil War so sharply interrupted in the

New Englanders, and Melville, and the unconscious Poe, will be resumed, and then we shall see whether we are sick of body, like Lawrence, or whether our vast energy, now bent upon the production of things, and nostalgia only for a less undifferentiated past, can still be turned into spiritual vigor without the dark magic of savage reversion to brutality and lust.

There will be no Hergesheimer then, but that is not to decry him. The historian of moods and appearances is valuable in literature. Like the humorists, if he does his work well, he lives. Scott and Jane Austen will see out our civilization.

There will be no Lawrences when Europe is well again, but that is not to brush him aside. He is like the psychiatrists. They will go when sick nerves die, or are reinvigorated. He is wise and very skillful, and if, like Freud, he puts the soul in the glands, that is a truer diagnosis than industrialism's contention that a Ford and a bath-tub guarantee content. He is luckier, too, than Melville, who wrote for a nineteenth century so robust that it would not believe in the germs that were cultured out of it. The modern reader neglects Lawrence at his peril. If he fails to read Hergesheimer he will miss a keen and civilized enjoyment. Fortunately it is the privilege of a swift-moving period, when even the air is full of intercommunication, to taste of different ages, different races, different hopes, all at once. But not to be them. Americans may work on from Hergesheimer, Europeans work back from Lawrence. For us, at least, the gallery of antiques seems a safer place than the reptile house. It is better to be too soon than too late.

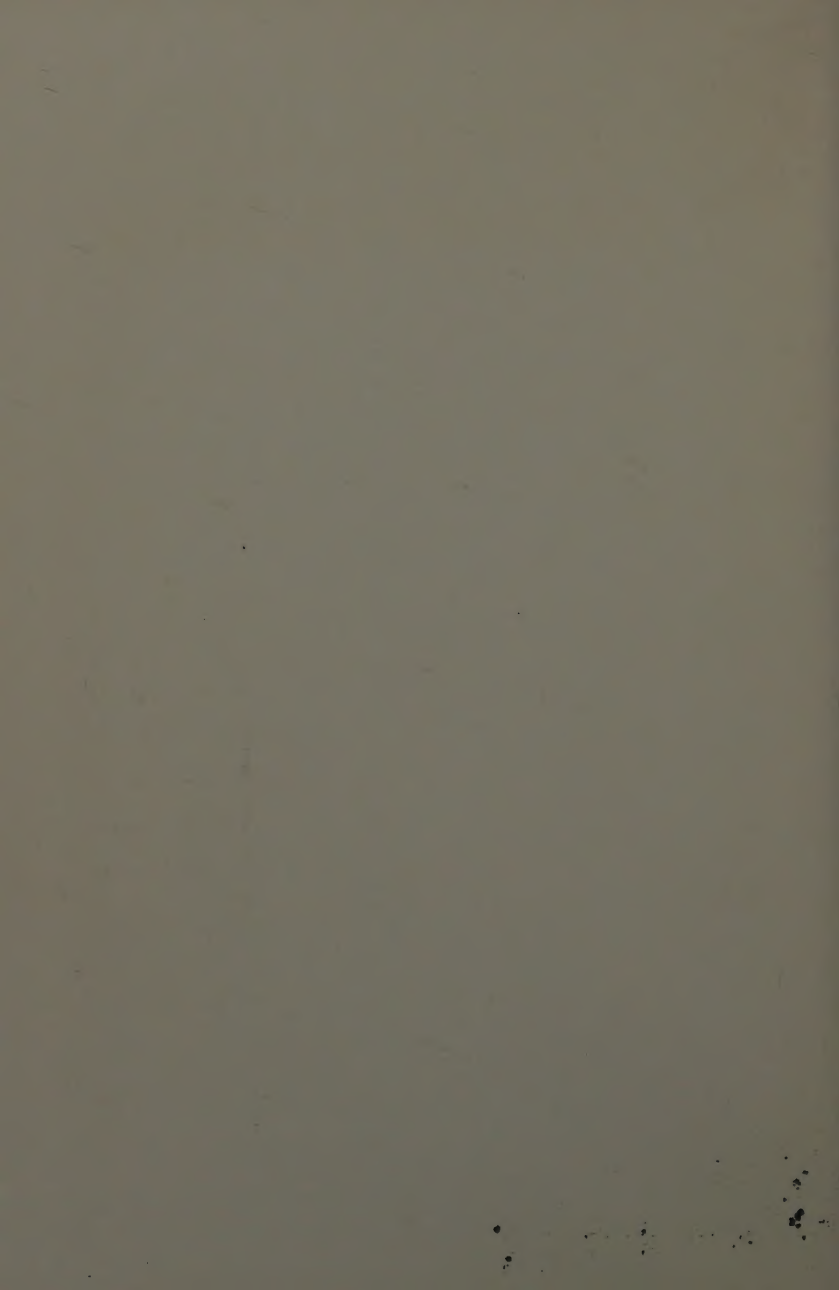












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